Animals & Men

The Journal of the Centre for Fortean Zoology

TOBY THE CFZ DOG
1985-2000 RIP

£2.00 ISSUE TWENTY-TWO

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EDITORIAL

The great Days of zoology are not done...

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the twenty second issue of *Animals & Men* I must apologise to some of our subscribers who did not receive issue 21 when it came out in April Back when I was working as a music journalist one of my jobs was to review fanzines I always have fond memories of one particularly shoddy magazine which failed to appear for nearly eighteen months and when it did, the editorial contained a number of excuses for the editor's tardiness

Apparently he had been appearing in a school production of *My Fair Lady* which had taken up so much of his time that he had been unable to churn out his ten page photocopied paen to Pink Floyd and other prog rock giants of the time

At least I have a better excuse Honest! Apart from Toby and Isabella dying I have also just announced my engagement to Lindy (who many of you met at the last Unconvention) and published four books Unfortunately in all the excitement we managed to screw up some of the subscriber files on the database and a bunch of people were unfortunately overlooked Everyone who is owed a copy of issue 21 will be receiving it at the same time as they receive this issue, and I hope you all forgive me

On a more positive note, those jolly nice people at the Devon County Council have given us a photocopier because we are a non-profit making organisation It wasn't planned like that but we've never made a bean from *Animals & Men* and it is refreshing to find out that for once our lack of business acumen seems to have been rewarded

This means that we should be able to resume the heavier schedule of publications that we had originally planned and that the CFZ will continue to make progress, to boldly go where other crypto organisations fear to tread etc

Let's hope so anyway

Until next time

Slainte

Jon Downes

NEWSFILE

Collated this issue by Jon and Richard

LAKE AND SEA MONSTERS

NESS THAN ZERO

A SCIENTIST who built a million-dollar submarine to trap the Loch Ness monster has called off his quest. American Dan Scott Taylor has postponed his mission indefinitely because of a lack of funds. Mr Taylor, who has devoted 30 years to building the 40ft mini-submarine Nessa, had expected a wave of adventurers to come forward with money. He planned to bring Nessa to Scotland this year but has not been able to find a sponsor.

Even his own team of volunteers has quit the project, convinced it will never work. Mr Taylor has not given up his dream of hunting for the monster and vowed to meet Nessie face-to-face one day.

The Nessa has sonar equipment and powerful lights for underwater photography and can travel at 23mph underwater. Mr Taylor first developed an obsession with the monster in the 60s and produced an early prototype submarine in 1969. *Aberdeen Press and Journal* 31/07/2000

TOURIST BOARD GETS THE HUMP

American scientist Dr Robert Rines - who has spent 30 years hunting the creatures of Loch Ness and who is responsible for two of the most impressive pictures ever taken of the monster allegedly owns a piece of land which is critical to a new visitor project.

Scottish newspapers claim that tourism chiefs have been unable to find him so he can give the go-ahead for a £500,000 walkway across land near his holiday home on the shores of Loch Ness at Drumnadrochit.

However when the Scottish Sunday Mail tracked down the 78-year-old academic down to his Boston office, he said it was the first he had heard of the project.

The long-awaited Great Glen Way is due to open next year, and experts predict it could lead to millions being poured into the area's economy.

The 73-mile walkway from Fort William to Inverness, could be in jeopardy if Dr Rines does not give his permission for access to the route.

Dr Rines said *"I'm not sure if I want thousands of people walking over my private property. It would have to be done in a tasteful way."* *Scottish Sunday Mail* 09/07/2000

HASTA LA BONAVISTA BABY

Cape Bonavista, courtesy the Copyright Liberation Front

While driving along Cape Bonavista one morning in April Bob Crewe came upon a creature like nothing he's ever seen before.

"I saw its body in the water measuring about 30 feet across, just lying there and moving slightly." said Crewe, who had stopped his truck on a cliff overlooking the ocean, in an area not far from an attraction known as The Dungeon and an old rock formation known locally as the Viking.

"It looked something like a rock in the water, but I knew there was no rock there. I blew the horn and it stuck its head out of the water. It had a long neck about four or five feet."

Crewe said from what he could see of the creature amid ripples in the water, it looked something like a huge snake which had some kind of "snout" on its head.

"I wish I had a camera aboard." said Crewe. *"It took off towards the lighthouse (at the tip of the cape) with its head still out of the water, tilted slightly forward. It seemed like it was using its body to push itself along and it was going very fast."*

In May 1997 in Little Bay East, Fortune Bay, fisherman Charles Bungay described seeing a creature with a long neck and gray scaly skin.

Bungay and a fishing partner spotted what they thought were floating garbage bags and decided to haul them aboard their boat.

When they got close, however, the creature reared up its head. He described it has having a neck about six feet long, a head like a horse, horns, and dark eyes. He estimated an overall length of about 30 to 40 feet.

The creature slipped under the water and disappeared. A Bay L'Argent fishermen saw a similar creature four or five years prior to that sighting. He described it as being like a dinosaur.

At the time, some people suggested the Fortune Bay fishermen actually saw a giant squid. Crewe, however, says what he saw was nothing as simple as that.

"It wasn't a giant squid. I know that for sure," he said. *"I wasn't close enough to see scaly skin or eyes or any detail like that.*

All I know is that was a strange creature, and it's a big ocean that could contain a lot of strange things we've never seen."

Source *The Telegram* St John's, Newfoundland Canada April 6 2000

NEW AND REDISCOVERED

TAKIN LIBERTIES

According to Paul Cropper s Weird Crypto News Internet newsletter ***"Chinese zoologists have found a group of 20 wild takins in a forest region in Zhen'an county, Shaanxi Province.The sighting of the rare beasts, which are under State rotection, is believed to be the first in almost 40 years and indicates that the ecological environment has been greatly improved."***

Richard Freeman comments that Takins have been filmed in recent years and he assumes that this news item refers to the first Chinese Takins to be seen in almost 40 years

OH NO "THEY`VE" DISCOVERED TWO MORE MARMOSETS

According to the Associated Press, on 22/4/2000, two squirrel-sized monkeys have been discovered in a remote corner of Brazil's Amazon Conservation International, a Washington-based international conservation group, announced the findings of Marc Von Roosmalen, a scientist from Brazil's Amazon National Research Institute

The two monkeys, which were discovered in northwestern Brazil, about 1,600 miles northwest of Rio de Janeiro, are the *Callithrix Manicorensis*, or Manicore Marmoset and the *Callithrix Acariensis*, or Acari Marmoset

An average adult of both species measures 9 inches with a 15-inch tail and weighs around 12 ounces

The *Callithrix Manicorensis* has a silvery white upper body, a light gray cap on its head, yellow to orange underparts and black tail. *The Callithrix Acariensis* has a snowy white upper body and under parts, a gray back with a stripe running to the knee and a black tail with a bright orange tip

The monkeys are named after the Manicore and Acari Rivers, the Amazon River tributaries near where they were found. Residents of the region keep them as pets

MISS YOUR TERN

A seabird that was thought to have become extinct in the 1930s has been re-discovered in the South China Sea. Six pairs of Chinese crested terns have been spotted rearing chicks on a tiny islet

They were seen by a tourist who sent photographs to the Wild Bird Federation, Taiwan, part of the global Birdlife International group

Experts have confirmed the find and are now keeping the exact location of the islet secret to prevent the birds being disturbed or their eggs stolen. It is known that fishermen looking for birds' eggs already visit the islet

Ornithologists say the last confirmed sighting of the Chinese crested tern (*Sterna bernsteini*) was of 21 specimens collected off Shandong in 1937. Scientists are unsure why the birds' numbers declined so sharply during the last century, but they suspect that egg poaching by passing fishermen, habitat destruction and pollution were mainly to blame

"This is a very exciting discovery, the Chinese crested tern is one of the least known and possibly the rarest seabird in the world." Dr Ian Nisbet, a world authority on terns, told the BBC

MONKEYING AROUND

Researchers believe Sumatran and Bornean orang-utans are distinct species. Dr Colin Groves, Reader in Biological Anthropology at the Australian National University in Canberra, says geneticists agree the differences between the Sumatran and Bornean species are greater than those between the common and pygmy chimp in Africa

Traditionally, taxonomists have treated the Sumatran orang-utan, *Pongo pygmaeus abelii*, and Bornean orang-utan *Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus* as sub-species. But the new genetic evidence, according to Dr Groves, suggests the two sub-species have had no genetic contact for hundreds of thousands of years, even during glacial periods when low sea levels linked Sumatra and Borneo

A new theory, based on genetic evidence from other species from Southeast Asia, including the Sumatran rhinoceros, suggests the extensive Sumatran and Bornean rainforests and all their mammal species, including orang-utans, were kept separated when they retreated into moist, protected gullies, and the margins of rivers and streams during prolonged glacial periods

Dr Groves says the Bornean and Sumatran orang-utans exhibit marked physical and genetic differences *Sydney Sunday Herald* 18/06/2000 P16

MORE MERMAIDS

Text of report in English by official Chinese news agency Xinhua (New China News Agency)

Nanning, 28th July: Hordes of dugongs [a whale-like sirenian mammal] have come back to the natural reserves in Beihai, a port city facing the Beibu Gulf in south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

The endangered sea mammal has been listed as a state protected animal. They were rarely seen in Beibu Gulf years ago. The Dugong Reserve in Beihai was set up in 1996. The tropical protection area covers some 300 sq.km. and has focused on growing the dugong's favourite seaweed. Dugongs have been returning in droves.

Dugong populations have decreased considerably due to hunting and other factors. There are only five dugong populations survive in the world, mainly in the sea off southeastern Africa, Malaysia, the Philippines, Australia and some Pacific islands.

Dugongs are sensitive to the cold and they will die if water temperature drops below 15 degrees Celsius, according to experts. They are therefore found warmer areas such as the Beibu Gulf and sea areas around Hainan and Guangdong provinces.

Source: Xinhua news agency, Beijing, in English 0818 gmt 28 Jul 00.

Editor's note A Dugong was harpooned in Hong Kong territorial waters in 1941, and they have been vagrants in various parts of the South China Seas for many years. They are of particular cryptozoological interest because of

the theories which link sightings of these peculiar creatures with the oriental folklore surrounding mermaids

CUDDLY THINGS IN STAFFORDSHIRE (NO WE DON`T MEAN NICK REDFERN)

A recent report suggests that one of Britain`s most attractive native mammals has returned to Staffordshire for the first time in over a century. According to newspaper reports researchers are turning detectives to track down mammals in the Moorlands.

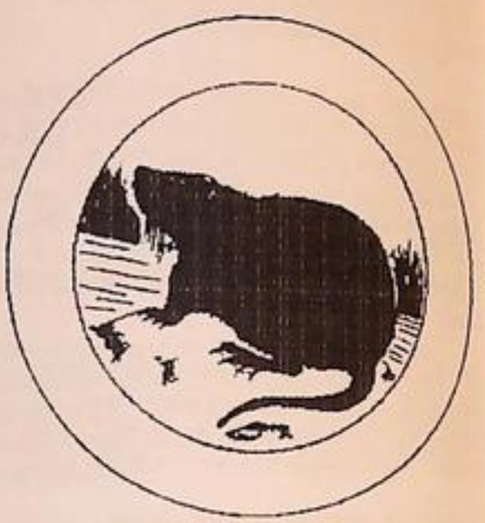
The hunt is on for bats, moles, foxes and badgers which may be living in the Ballington Wood area. And 'chief' detective Derek Crawley is also hoping to find evidence dormice may also be living there

This follows the recent discovery of dormice living in Loggerheads The mammal was believed to be extinct in Staffordshire for more than 120 years until a couple were discovered nesting in special boxes Staffordshire Wildlife Trust spokesman Nick Mott said: "The discovery is staggering and exciting - it is also a bit embarrassing that they have been there all the time and we have not identified them."

A hunt in Ballington Wood has already been carried out and the next will be at Shugborough Outdoor Centre near Milford, Stafford *The Stoke Sentinel*, 06/07/2000

EDITOR`S NOTE As Bernard Heuvelmans once said, there are indeed lost worlds everywhere But Staffordshire????? It is good to know that species can be rediscovered even in one of the most densely populated parts of the United Kingdom It gives all cryptozoologists great hope for even more exciting discoveries elsewhere in the world

OUT OF PLACE



According to the Associated Press on July 21st 2000 Arkansas is rife with tales of a giant snake that has been allegedly eating animals in Little River County have grown to great lengths.

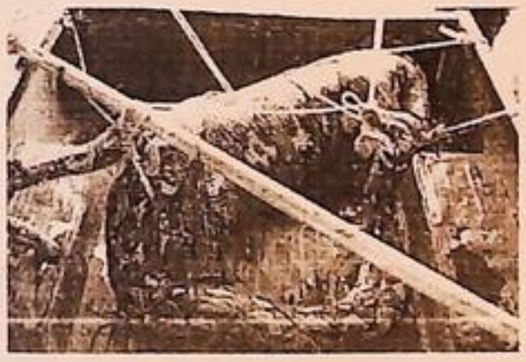
Now, an animal rescue group is being summoned from Pulaski County to try to catch the mysterious snake - reported to be 30 feet long by some accounts

Carol and Darryl Smith of the Arkansas Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Association plan to dig the snake out of its supposed den on Sunday

It should be interesting it could be a python it could be a boa constrictor it could be an anaconda. Mrs Smith told reporters *They thought it had been eating cats and small dogs It`s usually going to eat what is natural for it rats and mice and other small snakes*

Richard Freeman comments that it is probably an escapee However there are reports in the annals of North American forteana of massive snakes which have been reported from many parts of the United States Richard Freeman has made a study of beasts like the giant snake of Flat-top Mountain in the Appalacians, but believes that these creatures are zooform in nature rather than bona fide cryptids

However, on a related subject, the annals of forteana are also full of accounts of giant snakes eating human beings The following pictures, if genuine prove that this is not only quite possible but that the snake need not be all that long in order to add long pig to its diet Richard Freeman estimates that this reticulated python from Borneo is no more tha sixteen feet in length



The largest known reticulated python was over twice the length of this animal which apparently ate a child in Borneo earlier this year It was thirty three feet in length and was shot on the Celabese Islands (Sulawesi) well within living memory

These pictures are printed without disclaimer for their fortean value and not for any shock horror effect that they may have

DAY OF THE JACKAL

Hunters in central Moravia in the Czech Republic shot dead a jackal, believing they had been targeting a fox that had been trying to catch a rabbit

Expert Rudolf Novak afterwards told public Czech Radio that he was sure the killed animal was a jackal *"Unless it escaped from a zoo, this would be the northern most discovery of this type of animal species."* Novak said Workers from the Olomouc zoo told CTK that they did not know of any animals that had escaped

According to Novak, jackals are sometimes found in Hungary, southern Austria and the Southern part of Slovakia, but not in the Czech Republic He added that he believed the presence of this new predator in

the Czech Republic would cause further disruption to the ecological balance of wildlife

The jackal is a member of the dog family and is native to parts of Africa and Asia, but can also occasionally be spotted in southern Europe It is smaller than a wolf, is an omnivore and is active in twilight and at night *Ceska Tiskova Kancelar* 20 7 2000

SOMETHING FISHY

No sooner do the Centre for Fortean Zoology launch their own `Big Fish Project` (see elsewhere this issue) than reports of a very big fish indeed appear in one of our local newspapers. The following report (jokey comment n`all is taken verbatim from a piece in the Torquay Herald Express, which to our blushes was sent to us by Paul Cropper because we missed it ourselves):

`20Jun2000 UK

Now to go with the reports of big cats comes a sighting of a mystery big fish A fisherman who wishes to remain anonymous, says he has sighted a giant sturgeon in Kennick Reservoir

He claims the giant fish swam close to the bank while he was fishing there recently Now, you may dismiss this as just another story of the one that got away but it is not the first unusual sighting at Kennick

A barrister friend of mine swears blind that he once saw a dolphin swimming in the reservoir Despite the ridicule heaped upon his early-morning sighting he insists what he saw was a dolphin and has gone back many times in the hope of spying it again

Perhaps the dolphin and the recently spotted sturgeon are one and the same, or perhaps Loch Ness is not the only waterway with its own resident monster Anyway back to the big cats, there have now been two further sightings of a large black animal in the Haldon woods and towards Ashcombe to go with the recent reports near Chudleigh and Ideford `

MYSTERY CATS

• Leicestershire, UK

A further sighting of a large, panther-like black cat has been reported in the city of Leicester. A big cat, fitting the description of the animals seen roaming the Leicestershire countryside, was spotted in a garden in Thurnby Lodge in the early hours of the morning

William Saunders, of Tarbat Road, Thurnby Lodge saw the big black cat, which was about 2ft high and 5ft long, in the garden of his home at about 12 30am The 82-year-old said *"We tend to get the odd fox in the garden, so when I saw the light come on out the back I went into the kitchen expecting to see a fox but instead I saw I big black cat*

"I wasn't scared because I was indoors, but I was surprised to see it come so close to the house "I'm not worried about it because if you leave them alone

they won't attack I've heard they only attack when they are cornered "

The latest sighting is the third in the city in two weeks A big cat was spotted just 25 yards from a house in Gilmorton Avenue, Aylestone, the week before and a week earlier, a similar big cat was spotted near the Saffron Lane estate It brings the total sightings so far this year to 64 n smashing last year's tally of 56 sightings over 12 months

David Spencer, of the Leicestershire and Rutland Panther Watch group, said *"This sighting doesn't surprise me They seem to be coming into gardens more and more now n particularly at night They seem to be after the urban foxes I don't think we've got anything to fear from them They will only attack if they are injured "* *Leicester Mercury* 28/07/2000

• Taunton, Somerset, UK

I would hate anyone to think that the inclusion of the following news item about the so-called Beast of Blackdown has anything to do with your beloved editor s new book *The Blackdown Mystery* which is advertised elsewhere in this issue but it seemed too good an opportunity to miss

A female puma and a litter of young cubs are believed to be living in a lair just a few miles from the centre of Taunton The animal has been spotted sitting by the roadside on the Blackdown Hills And now the partly-eaten carcasses of two roe deer have led local investigators to a culvert beneath a stretch of road near Churchinford, which they believe the animal uses regularly. A puma was seen sitting in the middle of a road in the area early one morning about a month ago But the latest sighting was made by former chef Sophie Stevens as she drove her children Imogen, aged four, and Charlie, three, to school in Wellington She told how at first she thought the animal she could see ahead was either a sheep or a pony She said I hoped whatever it was it wasnt going to jump out at me, but then as I got nearer and it stood up I saw what it was It was at least four-and-a-half to five feet long in the body and the tail was probably another two-and-a-half feet She was fawn, but when the sunlight fell on her as she moved she was almost white

Mrs Stevens dropped her children off and returned to the spot as she drove to her home near the Holman Clavel Inn I looked around for a bit and then I came across its kill, a fully grown roe deer, she said It had obviously just killed it at that point I went back and found my brother and took him down there and by that time the carcass had been dragged some way away and more of it had been eaten

Then when I went back to pick up the children I checked again and it had been moved even further away It was lying outside the entrance to this large drain which runs right under the road and there were the older remains of another deer lying next to it. Story originally published by *Cambridgeshire News* June 8 2000

• Illinois, USA

Thanks to Loren Coleman for the first documented mountain lion in Illinois since 1862 died in Randolph County A railroad crew found a lion carcass near the Fort Kaskaskia Historic Site The 110-pound male cat apparently was decapitated after being hit by a train

The body has been taken to Southern Illinois University's Cooperative Wildlife Research Laboratory in Carbondale, where director Al Woolf will take samples of bones and tissues for clues on where the mountain lion entered the state *"The cat had eaten before it was killed,"* Woolf said *"There were tissues hair and debris in the lion's insides We may have more clues in a few days "* Tests so far found that the lion was alive when the train hit it There were no traces of pet food, suggesting the cat was wild And a lack of tattoos indicated it was not in captivity Someone who keeps exotic animals *"may have released the lion into the wild or failed to keep the animal properly caged "* said Tim Schwiezer, spokesman for the state Department of Natural

Resources 19 July 2000 *Chicago Illinois) Sun Times*

.....AND FINALLY

Many thanks to our friend Nichola Sullings for sending the following excerpts from something called *The Conspiracy Journal* which appears to be published by the notorious Commander X If so, I make no apologies for printing this recent roundup of South American Chupacabra news in full...

* Chileans Say Alien Eggs Were Found Near Calama

Witnesses in Chile continued to come forward this week with more about the reputed clash between Chilean Army troops and three Chupacabra on or about May 9, 2000. Two witnesses claimed that the Chilean troops returned with large eggs, which they reportedly obtained from a "nest" in the Atacama Desert not far from the Radomiro Tomic mine.

According to the newspaper La Cuarta, "Three specimens of Chupacabra, mythical creatures of apelike characteristics who drink animal blood, were captured in northern Chile by an expedition spearheaded by NASA and were taken back to the United States, according to researchers of the subject." "The president of the Ovalvision Chile research group, Cristian Riffo told La Cuarta that the creatures were the result of genetic research by NASA using terrestrial creatures and space entities. Several of the hybrid creatures escaped from a secret base and propagated themselves in the southern United States, Mexico and Puerto Rico where they were given the name Chupacabras."

"Riffo maintains that in the Chilean case, the Chupacabras fled from the Atacama Desert where the U.S. agency is trying to replicate the conditions of a voyage to the planet Mars." "He added that all the (eyewitness) descriptions coincide in that the specimen measures 1.2 meters (3 feet, 9 inches) in height, has large staring eyes, very swift legs, has humanoid features, a mandrill-like body, and a way of walking that causes it to zigzag." Chupacabra news is coming fast and furious from Chile. The latest items include the following.

(1) Between June 12 and June 15, 2000, residents of Maria Elena, a farm community 140 kilometres (84 miles) west of Calama, found mysterious clawed footprints in the fields. "Identical to the footprints found at the (Radomiro Tomic) mine" at the time of the reported capture, said radio talk show host Pablo Aguilera, with the prints "highlighting their large shape and the sharpness of the claws."

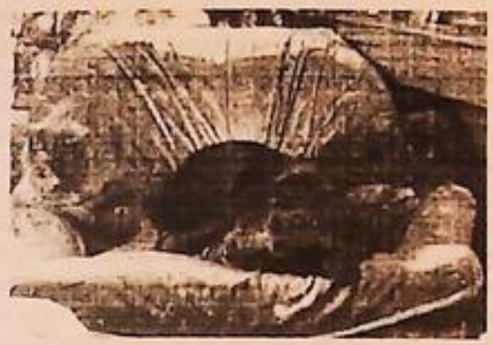
(2) The newspaper Diario La Estrella reported. "Guards of a security company in the sector claim to have witnessed a strange entity on the prowl, and while they were unable to see it entirely, stated that it moved at considerable speed."

(3) An area resident, Miguel O., claimed that his nephew, who is in the Chilean Army, was on guard duty at the Radomiro Tomic mine and saw one of the creatures.

"Between May 9 and May 11," Miguel O. said, his nephew "while standing guard with his regiment, he had a chance to see a specimen of the so-called Chupacabras and immediately called his superior."

The strange creature took prodigious leaps and bounds and, at one point, gave the impression of floating on the air. He described it as 1.2 meters tall, half-hairy and hunched over." After gearing up, an army patrol went out into the desert. Miguel said. "The most surprising thing is that the patrol returned with several 'eggs' found at the location where the creatures were taken by surprise. He added that the patrol managed to kill two and capture one, that the creatures were subsequently removed by NASA personnel from the area."

OBITUARY



TOBY THE CFZ DOG 1985-2000

by Jonathan Downes

Anyone who has visited the Centre For Fortean Zoology since its inception nearly a decade ago will have met, made friends with, or possibly have been bitten by Toby the CFZ Dog. He has been my constant companion for fifteen years now and without straying into the realms of anthropomorphism, he has probably been my closest friend during that time. I bought him for a fiver in 1985 when he was only a few weeks old and he has been with me ever since.

When I founded the CFZ in 1991/2 he took to his new existence like the proverbial duck to water and soon became a mild celebrity within fortean circles, appearing on television and speakers platform with us on many occasions. He also accompanied us on all of our UK based adventures and investigations and never failed to do something revolting, usually when there was a TV camera pointed at him. If there was a rare specimen to be eaten Toby would eat it, and if there was an inappropriate place to crap, he would invariably crap there.

In the last year he had been suffering from failing health and his last "public" performances were in the crowd scenes of the Owlman movie and centre stage in "The Brassknocker Hill Project" a spoof of Blair Witch that we made for HTV. He has been a firm friend, a loyal companion and a true member of the CFZ Community.

It is with great sadness, therefore, that I have to tell all his friends and admirers across the world, that after a short battle with cancer he went off his feet on the 31st May and was finally put to sleep on the first of June, which coincidentally was Ascension Day. To say that he will be sadly missed is an understatement! Sadly, Isabella our cat, who had been a close companion to Toby all his life went into a decline soon after his death and died peacefully a few weeks later. We received a lot of letters of condolence from friends and colleagues in the weeks after his death. One of the most poignant was from Simon Reames, a member of the Exeter Strange Phenomena Research Group.

I liked Toby. He was a good dog and from what I remember, he was always happy. Except for when [Nick] Redfern was about - then he started growling. He has been immortalised in film and in people's minds. I don't think that anyone will forget him though he will be missed. The world has lost a good dog, and the people, a good friend. - Simon Reames

Graham's note on Nick. Yeah, Toby did seem to have a bit of a 'thing' about bald UFOlogists dressed wholly in black!

"There is sorrow enough in the natural way
from men and women to fill our day
so when we are certain of sorrow in store,
why do we always arrange for more?
Brothers and sisters I bid you beware
Of giving your heart to a dog to tear."

Rudyard Kipling

NB: On the picture at the top of the page, Isabella (also 1985-2000) can be seen sitting to the right of Toby.

OBITUARY

John Victor Aspinall
1926 – 2000

By Chris Moiser

When Jon Downes asked me to write an obituary for John Aspinall I panicked. I panicked because there was a constraint on space. When Cecil Rhodes died his alleged last words were "so much to do, so little time". With John Aspinall I think that we can alter the sentiment to acknowledge his vast number of achievements, and yet I am sure that he would have wanted to achieve that much more than he did. The fact was that he achieved more than most of us can ever even aspire to.

As with all truly great people I suppose that we can say that he was a great eccentric. Such characters are possibly moulded by their environment, certainly his upbringing was, by present standards, unorthodox.

He was born to an Anglo-Indian family and only came to England when he started prep school. His schooling was a bit of a shambles due to his rebellious nature, contrary to what the *Times* obituary said he was not expelled from Rugby, it was more of a negotiated early leaving. His mother had remarried at this stage, and the war was in full swing, so, contrary to all previous evidence with regard to his attitude to authority he volunteered and joined the Royal Marines. little is known of the three and half years that he spent with them, except a rather nice story about his first few days. When other recruits in his intake found themselves short of kit before the first kit inspection "Aspers" gave them his. The whole of his intake started to get concerned when they realised that he had little kit left, and that he was likely to get into serious trouble. He dealt with the issue simply by giving the rest of his kit away! At the dreaded kit inspection, the adjutant, not unnaturally, asked why he didn't have any kit. "Aspers" replied quite simply that he had never been issued with any! Shocked at such a failure of the system, the adjutant immediately ordered that he be given a full set of kit.

After leaving the marines a career in the City was carefully avoided and he went to Oxford, purportedly to read English literature, in practice to develop his gambling skills. He never graduated. there was a clash between final examinations and Royal Ascot. He then entered a period that Brian Masters in his *"The Passion of John Aspinall"* describes as "The Floating Gambler"

At this time gaming laws were much stricter than today, and eventually he ended up before the courts. After an acquittal the Gaming Laws had to be altered as a direct result of the circumstances in his case. It was at this time that his acquisition of large exotic mammals started. A flat in Belgravia contained Aspinall, a tiger, two bears and a monkey.

The neighbours started to complain, and a local Alsatian dog disappeared under mysterious circumstances, so he had to look for somewhere in the country.
In 1956, Howletts became available. he could afford the deposit, but it took a lucky bet in the Cesarewitch to pay the remainder of the asking price. The liberalisation of the gaming laws enabled him to set up his London clubs, the Claremont first, and then "Aspinall's". As his animal collection increased beyond that which he could house at Howletts, he bought Port Lympne.

Initially totally and fiercely independent of the zoo/conservation world, he was treated with

suspicion by the fathers of modern zoo management. A classical interchange occurred when it was discovered that he was keeping Gorillas on deep straw litter, nobody had done that before. He responded by pointing out that disinfected concrete was hardly mimicking the wild.

As he aged, Aspinall regarded himself more and more as a conservationist, his love for Gorillas and Tigers being particularly well known. His attempts to rehabilitate Gorillas in Africa going further than anyone had before in many respects. His particular secret of success in animal husbandry being to encourage his keepers to develop close relationships with their charges. Such efforts were not without a price, and the tiger and elephant related deaths amongst his staff brought him again into conflict with authority. The High Court followed, and backed his argument though when Canterbury Council sought to exercise its powers to try and prevent keepers from entering the tigers cages.

One of his last acts was to put the finishing touches to the John Aspinall Foundation which will continue his work with the two animal parks. No matter how well this has been set up, whether it succeeds or not without the master at the rudder will only become apparent in time.

Although he only wrote one book, *"The Best of Friends"*, published in 1976, Aspinall was a prolific, but thoughtful writer.

His views were clearly right-wing, and often surprising. He described Christianity as the religion of slaves, and wondered how anyone could worship an apprentice carpenter.

Some of his critics had referred to him as being racist. This is most unlikely as he had based certain aspects of his life on the lead character in Rider-Haggard's book, "Nada the Lily". He first read the book in his first year at Rugby. it is the story of the illegitimate son of a Zulu chief.

Aspinall was a great supporter of the Zulus in South Africa, donating money towards their education and accusing the west of betraying them in their struggle against the ANC. One of the greatest honours he considered ever to have been bestowed upon him was at his 70th birthday party when Chief Buthelezi, the zulu leader pronounced him a "white zulu".

The birthday party was hosted by one of his long term friends, and part of the original Claremont set, (together with lord Lucan), Sir James Goldsmith. It was only natural that, when Sir James set up the Referendum Party to contest the 1997 general election on an anti-European footing, Aspinall should stand. He stood for Folkestone and Hythe, but came fourth, with 8% of the vote. He obviously carried some personal following because he polled considerably more votes than the party leader, Sir James, had in his own constituency. Over the last three years he had suffered from cancer; soon after diagnosis he was quoting odds on his own survival.

Despite early surgery and treatment it became clear that he would not survive. He bore his illness stoically, and, when he and his wife were attacked outside their Belgravia home last year, despite severe injuries to his face, he made light of his injuries and praised his wife for her steadiness under attack. He died on Thursday 29th June at Port Lympne, close to the animals that he loved. He was buried at Howlett's Wild Animal Park near the grave of his infant daughter and those of some of his gorillas.

May his dream live on.

Siyanikhumbula,
Baba Umlungu
(Zulu - We remember you, white father)

Donations in memory of John Aspinall can be made to the Gorilla Release Project in Africa. Cheques made payable to C.F.P.I. and sent to Port Lympne Wild Animal Park, Lympne, Nr Hythe, Kent CT21 4PD.

WEASELS, WOLVERINES, BADGERS AND SKUNKS: HISTORICAL BIOLOGY AND EVOLUTION OF THE MUSTELIDS

By Darren Naish

Introducing the mustelids

Mustelids - including the 67 living species of weasels, skunks, badgers and all of their close relatives - are ecologically, behaviourally and morphologically diverse, geographically widespread carnivorans that have a fossil record extending back to the late Eocene. Mustelids are generally long-bodied and short-legged with wide and low skulls that have rather short jaws and reduced molar teeth. Sexual dimorphism is the rule - males may be significantly larger than females, so much so that the two sexes may operate as different ecological 'species'. There is tremendous size variation amongst mustelid species: today, the largest species (*Enhydra lutris*, the Sea otter) is 1000 times heavier than the smallest (*Mustela nivalis*, the Least weasel) (Macdonald 1992). Living mustelids fall into five fairly discrete groups that have traditionally been regarded as subfamilies.

- **Badgers** (Melinae) are terrestrial, omnivorous woodland mustelids of the Old World.
- **Skunks** (Mephitinae) are terrestrial American carnivores/omnivores that are all boldly patterned in black and white. They are famous for defending themselves with a spray of foul-smelling liquid from their anal glands.
- **Otters** (Lutrinae) are aquatic predators of both sea and fresh water.
- **Weasels** (Mustelinae) are long-bodied predatory or omnivorous mustelids that include species that forage in rodent and rabbit burrows, in trees, or in water.
- **Honey badgers** (Mellivorinae) are heavily built, powerful generalists of grassland and woodland. They are mostly predatory but also eat bees and their honey.

Fig. 1: Representatives of the five extant mustelid groups. 1. Eurasian badger (*Meles meles*), **Melinae**, 2. Striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), **Mephitiniae**. 3. Giant otter (*Pteronura brasiliensis*), **Lutrinae**. 4. Least weasel (*Mustela nivalis*), **Mustelinae**. 5. Ratel (*Mellivora capensis*), **Mellivorinae**.

The grouping of mustelids into numerous separate subfamilies - a tradition that really started with Pocock (1921) (he recognised 15 subfamilies, many of them housing a single genus) - is becoming increasingly unwarranted as evolutionary studies better indicate the relationships between the mustelid groups. Recent studies on morphological features indicate that skunks, badgers and otters belong together in a group that must be called **Melinae** while true weasels, the grisons, and all of their relatives belong in a meline sister-group, the **Mustelinae**. The precise affinities of problematic groups like American badgers, the Wolverine and the Honey badger are still controversial, and are discussed separately here.

Doubt lingers over whether the Mustelidae is a monophyletic group or nor: they may not be, as molecular data suggests that skunks are not mustelids, but instead the sister-group to the arctoids (Wayne et al. 1989, Vrana et al. 1994). Arctoids are all dog-branch carnivorans excepting dogs - that is, mustelids, procyonids (raccoons and their relatives), ursids (bears), amphicyonids (bear-dogs), and pinnipeds (seals).

A further confound in mustelid phylogeny is the possibility raised by Leonard Radinsky (1973) that stink badgers (*Mydaus* and *Suillotaxus*) are more closely related to skunks than they are to other mustelids. Radinsky based his argument on the external brain morphology of these creatures and found that, in stink badgers and skunks, it was apparently more primitive than that seen in some of the earliest mustelids known from the fossil record. Therefore, a stink badger-skunk clade may have diverged before all other kinds of mustelids had evolved. This is in keeping with the molecular studies mentioned above - it would also indicate that stink badgers are not close relatives of true badgers (which would then be restricted to *Meles*, *Arctonyx* and *Melogale*). Future work will no doubt propose new phylogenetic models, and perhaps refute these older ones.

'Paleomustelids' vs 'Neomustelids'

Mustelids are united by an inflated auditory bulla and distinctively reduced molar teeth that possess a unique pattern of cusps. These morphological features indicate that all mustelids descend from a single ancestor but molecular studies call this conclusion into question. Mustelids share a number of skull features with procyonids and both groups are united as the Musteloidea or Mustelida by some workers (Flynn et al. 1988, Tedford et al. 1994).

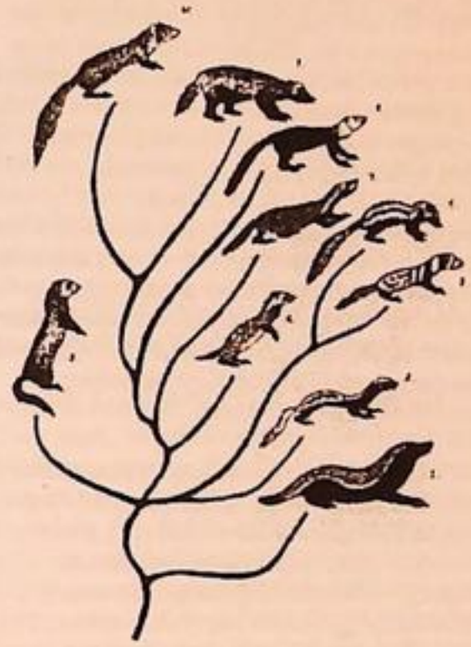


Fig. 2: Branching order of extant musteline mustelids as proposed by Bininda-Emonds *et al.* (1999). 1. *Mellivora*. 2. *Poecilogale*. 3. *Vormela*. 4. *Ictonyx*. 5. *Mustela*. 6. *Lyncodon*. 7. *Galictis*. 8. *Eira*. 9. *Gulo*. 10. *Martes*.

All 'modern-type' mustelids - badgers, skunks, otters, weasels, etc. - are united by the loss or reduction of a number of features seen in more primitive mustelids and are known informally as 'neomustelids'. Defining 'neomustelid' characters include the absence of a notch on the upper premolar and the loss of the postscapular fossa (Baskin 1998). Primitive mustelids are informally dubbed 'paleomustelids', and are basically an artificial group that lack the dental and skeletal characters seen in all 'neomustelids'. Though their relationships are still in a state of flux, there are essentially three groups of 'paleomustelids' - the mustelavines, plesictids and oligobunines.

Extinct groups of mustelids

Perhaps the most primitive of all mustelids are the **mustelavines**, a late Eocene-mid Oligocene group that might actually represent a primitive ancestral group for true mustelids and procyonids. It has also been suggested that members of this group may belong within the procyonids or within the Amphicyonidae, the 'bear-dog' family.
Mustelavines first appear in the late Eocene of North America, and by the early Oligocene were also to be found in Europe. Mustelavines probably show us what the most primitive mustelids looked like: that is, rather similar to all generalised primitive arctoids - low-slung, long-tailed generalists something like the living ringtails (*Bassariscus*).

Eurasian mustelavines appear to have been ancestral to two other groups of 'paleomustelids', the ***Plesictis* group**, and the **oligobunines**. *Plesictis* is a small, problematic genus consisting of more than 20 species known from the early Oligocene to early Miocene of Europe, China and North America. The North American specimen, a single lower jaw fragment from the early Miocene of South Dakota (Macdonald 1970), indicates that this group migrated out of Eurasia late in its history. Complete skulls known from European species (Beaumont and Weidmann 1981) show that *Plesictis* was large-eyed with squared, blunt molars suggestive of omnivory. Like mustelavines, they have been regarded as long-tailed *Bassariscus*-like scansorial generalists. An outstanding problem is that *Plesictis* is almost certainly not a monophyletic genus, but a paraphyletic assemblage of basal paleomustelids. Future work might indicate that several different lineages are included among this assemblage.

Oligobunines were small to very large Oligocene-Miocene mostly cat-shaped mustelids that do not seem to have been ancestral to any modern mustelids (but read on). Again, they originated in Eurasia from mustelavine-type ancestors and different lineages invaded North America at several times during their history. Most oligobunines were domestic cat-sized terrestrial predators but *Megalictis* (see below) was a leopard-sized giant while *Brachypsalis* was a highly succesful long-legged form that apparently survived past the extinction of all other oligobunines at the end of the early Miocene, perhaps because of this unusual morphology (Baskin 1998). It has been argued that the amphibious *Potamotherium*, often regarded as a sort of seal ancestor (which, if correct (Tedford 1976, Muizon 1982), means that living seals are highly specialized oligobunines!•), is an oligobunine, in which case oligobunines also include aquatic species *Potamotherium*, like *Brachypsalis*, managed to survive past the early Miocene.
•The most recent appraisal of *Potamotherium* (Wyss 1991) found it to be an "aquatic mustelid offshot, perhaps related to lutrines". Wyss found that the features previously used to link this genus with phocid seals could not be supported.

Two genera of oligobunine, the late Oligocene-early Miocene North American genera *Promartes* and *Zadiolestes*, are famous for having first been discovered within the corkscrew-shaped burrows of the terrestrial beaver *Palaeocastor*. As a result they have at times been regarded as polecat-like underground predators. However, this seems unlikely for *Zadiolestes* given the proportions of its ulna and foot bones and its lack of the short-legged, weasel-like body shape. Jon Baskin (1998) argues instead that this animal may have utilised burrows as den sites, much as do other small and medium-sized carnivorans. *Promartes*, however, recalls the American badger in features of its humerus and may therefore have been a powerful digger (Baskin 1998).

'Neomustelids' first appear in the latest Oligocene or early Miocene of Europe and appear to have replaced more primitive mustelids entirely by the end of the early Miocene (excepting the specialised forms *Brachypsalis* and *Potamotherium*, as noted above). An entirely extinct 'neomustelid' group, the **Leptarctinae**, represent a putative sister-group to the Melinae-Mustelinae clade. Leptarctine morphology is not well understood, but their skulls and teeth are highly distinctive and recall the form of *Taxidea* - too surprisingly, it has been suggested that American badgers and leptarctines are close relatives. Perhaps

leptarctines competed with American badgers. Their extinction in the late Miocene might therefore, it has been suggested, be the result of competition.

As a result of their similarity to American badgers, leptarctines have been regarded as omnivores (Qiu and Schmidt-Kittler 1982), though more recently Jong-Deock Lim (1996) has argued that *Leptarctus* from the late Miocene of Mongolia and North America was a fruit eater, and perhaps much like *Procyon* (raccoons) in ecology and lifestyle. *Leptarctus* is further interesting in that, alone amongst mammals with the exception of *Phascolarctos* (the koala), it has an unusual anteriorly directed hooked process growing off the auditory bulla. Based on comparison with the tongue musculature of other carnivorans, Lim (1997) suggested that *Leptarctus* may have had exceptionally powerful tongue retraction musculature and may therefore have used its tongue in food gathering - maybe for pulling in leaves or collecting insects. More information is clearly needed on the leptarctine skeleton before we can be at all confident about how they really lived.

Another extinct 'neomustelid' group, the **Ischyrictini**, contains Miocene and Pliocene Eurasian and North American forms. Tooth characters indicate that ischyrictins are primitive mustelines that may have affinities with martens but are outside of the true weasel group. Whether or not they are more closely related to some members of the true weasel group, however, remains highly controversial as it has been suggested many times that the ischyrictins *Eomellivora* and *Plesiogulo* are ancestral to, respectively, the Honey badger and the Wolverine. After the oligobunine *Megalictis*, these two genera (together with *Perunium* from Miocene Eurasia) were probably the biggest of all mustelids: *Plesiogulo* has been estimated to have weighed 45 kg (Baskin 1998).

Megalictis: "*The most remarkable mustelid of all time*"

Perhaps the most famous fossil mustelid is *Megalictis*, also known by its probable junior synonym *Aelurocyon*. Both names were created in 1907 - *Aelurocyon* by Peterson, *Megalictis* by Matthew - and while at times the two have been regarded as distinctive on the basis of trivial cranial features, they are currently regarded as representative of a single species, *M. ferox*. Which generic name should have priority has been controversial. Most recently, Hunt and Skolnick (1996) have argued that *Megalictis* is the name we should use.

Probably related to forms like *Oligobunis* and *Zadiolestes*, *Megalictis* was one of the oligobunines. While most oligobunines were domestic cat-sized, *Megalictis* was an exception in being comparatively huge. Like cats, the animal had a deep, shortened skull with reduced cheek teeth - features not seen in other oligobunines and otherwise typical of 'neomustelids'. In the proportions of its skeleton, *Megalictis* has been found to resemble cats, like *Smilodon*, and nimravids, like *Hoplophoneus*: animals which are thought to have been ambush predators that stalked prey from dense cover (Baskin 1998). It is enthralling to imagine this gigantic predatory mustelid hunting large ungulates in this manner.

How may a carnivoran of this size interacted with other large predators? Noting the disappearance of the nimravids at about the same time as *Megalictis* first appeared (early Miocene), Riggs (1945) made the suggestion that *Megalictis* may have actively competed with them, causing their virtual extinction. This hypothesis is especially interesting given that *Megalictis* appears to have been so cat-like - as were nimravids too, of course. However, Jon Baskin (1998) has noted that this scenario is very unlikely given that *Megalictis* is quite a rare fossil, whereas early Miocene nimravids were actually quite common. Given all this hype over the large size of *Megalictis* - many popular texts describe it as "as big as a black bear" (Lambert 1985) - it is worth asking how large it really was. Comparing what is known of *Megalictis* with measurements recorded from *Gulo*, Baskin

(1998) suggests that a live *Megalictis* may have weighed two to three times as much as *Gulo* that is, about 30-45 kg. This is about the same size as a leopard (28-90 kg), not a black bear (92-270 kg) (Nowak 1983). Still, a leopard-sized mustelid would still be a pretty impressive and dangerous beast!

Mellivora, the Afroasian Honey badger or Ratel

"*Mellivora* seems devoid of fear, and it is doubtful that any animal of equivalent size can regularly kill it. It may rush out from its burrow and charge an intruder, especially in the breeding season. Horses, antelopes, cattle, and even buffalo have been attacked and severely wounded in this manner" (Nowak 1983).

"Devouring any victim it sets its heart on, it will attack venemous cobras or sharp-quilled porcupines. It is even said to fly at and attack the formidable bull buffalo ten times its own size!" (Maurice Burton, n.d.).

Like the Wolverine, *Mellivora* is famed for its aggressive nature and apparent fearlessness. Stuart and Stuart (1988) were aware of cases where *Mellivora* had apparently attacked elephants (!!) and people. It is reputed to kill anything it can catch and to steal carrion from big cats and hyaenas. As with the Wolverine, much of this is hype, but at the same time it does have some basis in fact. *Mellivora* is handsomely patterned in black, grey and white, with a highly variable extent of the light-coloured dorsal mantle. Entirely black individuals have often been recorded and some individuals exhibit a dark grey back bordered by a narrow white boundary. Previously these variations were awarded taxonomic status: melanistic individuals, for example, were coined *M. cottoni* by Lydekker (1906), while Pocock (1909) named *M. leuconata* for a form with a light dorsal stripe and dark hindquarters, *M. signata* for a specimen in which the light mantle was restricted to a crescent-shaped patch on the head, and several others. Based on a few eyewitness accounts, including that from the hunter F. Edmond-Blanc, Heuvelmans (1995) suggested that there might exist a truly gigantic form of *Mellivora* for which he suggested the name *M. ratel maxima*. Currently we recognise only a single living species, *M. capensis*.

Given the apparent ferocity and fearlessness of the Ratel, it might follow that other, similar-sized animals might attempt to mimic it. The advantages are obvious as, excepting *Mellivora*!, probably no known predator is inclined to attack it. Furthermore, *Mellivora* has a bold, unmistakable appearance that is presumably easily identified by those species that encounter it. Eaton (1976) has therefore proposed that one creature does attempt to mimic the Ratel: namely, *Acinonyx jubatus*, the cheetah! Or rather, juvenile cheetah. Unlike adults, juvenile cheetah have a fluffy, silver dorsal mane (the feature responsible, incidentally, for their specific name 'jubatus'). Eaton raised the intriguing possibility that juvenile cheetah exhibit this feature so that they might mimic *Mellivora*, and therefore be afforded some protection from predators. However, this is hardly convincing: the similarity is extremely superficial and doesn't seem to protect juvenile cheetah from lions and other predators. Incidentally, mimicry of a mustelid is also hinted at in the case of the African Zorilla (*Ictonyx striatus*) and Striped weasel (*Poecilogale albinucha*). In this case, the smaller Striped weasel might imitate the larger and more aggressive Zorilla.

Presently, *Mellivora* is distributed throughout the whole of Africa except for the centre of the Sahara, the Mediterranean coast, the Nile Valley, and Orange Free State. Outside of Africa, its distribution extends from the Middle East to eastern India (Nowak 1983, Kingdon 1997). Its absence from areas within this range may be due to human persecution. It is essentially an animal of open woodland but also occurs in desert steppe habitats, scrublands and mountainous moorland. An ambling, terrestrial forager, *Mellivora* subsists largely on invertebrates and rodents. Famously, it sometimes forms an

alliance with the Honeyguide (*Indicator indicator*) - after locating a bee nest, the Honeyguide finds a Ratel and 'informs' it by way of a tail-flashing display. The Ratel follows the bird and, on finding the bee nest, demolishes it and feeds on the bee larvae and honey. The Honeyguide benefits by having access to wax and larvae following the Ratel's departure. *Mellivora* has a limited climbing ability: I have seen film of one that climbed into a tree to eat an antelope carcass cached by a leopard.

Despite its name, *Mellivora* is almost certainly not a badger. Badgers are characterised by reduced carnassials, enlarged, flat, multicuspate molars (numbering 6 in *Meles*), and a highly mobile, elongate snout. *Mellivora*, which lacks all of these features, is emphatically not a badger and is most probably a giant striped weasel - the identity argued for by Jonathan Kingdon (1997), among others. The South American grisons (*Galictis*) appear to illustrate the way in which a small musteline can evolve a *Mellivora*-like appearance. Both *Mellivora* and the small *Mellivora*-like mustelines possess the reduced compliment of 4 molars, indicating a trend opposite to that seen in badgers. As noted earlier, however, *Mellivora* has a possible precursor in the ischyrictin *Eomellivora*. This may indicate that *Mellivora* is a modern-day ischyrictin and that its similarities to true weasels are, like its similarities to badgers, convergent. Clearly, more work is needed.

UPDATE: A holistic review of carnivoran phylogeny, published recently by Olaf Bininda-Emonds, John Gittleman and Andy Purvis (1999), provides a phylogenetic scheme for the mustelids, as well as for all other extant carnivorans. The authors found *Mellivora* to be nested well within the mustelids, and to be the sister-group to the mustelines. It was not nested within any of the mustelid subgroups (there being no evidence for it being allied with *Poecilogale*, for example), nor was it at all close to badgers or the Wolverine.

Are American badgers badgers?

Similarly, it may be that American badgers (the Taxidiini: *Pliotaxidea* and *Taxidea*) are not true badgers either: while they share with true badgers a number of tooth characteristics, they may truly be close relatives of the fossil leptarctines. A recent review (Bininda-Emonds et al. 1999) found *Taxidea* to be close to the base of the mustelid tree and, though phylogenetically isolated from other mustelids, closest to otters, skunks and badgers. Because it did not nest within badgers, nor was it their sister-taxon, its badger-like features probably are convergent or, alternatively, represent primitive mustelid characters that have been retained by badgers and *Taxidea*, but lost by other mustelids. Again, a fuller understanding of the true affinities of the American badgers must await future research. Originally described as a new species of bear (it was named *Ursus taxidea* by Schreber in 1778), the living American badger (*Taxidea taxus*) is a thickset burrowing omnivore of North America, occurring from SW Canada down to Mexico. When lying down or digging, its body appears notably flattened, something due, in part, to its very loose skin. This enables it to turn easier when in burrows underground. Usually greyish on its upper parts, it is sometimes reddish and the white stripe that reaches backwards from the head stops at the shoulders in northern animals, but extends to the rump in southern ones. *T. taxus* is more carnivorous than are true badgers, and may at times subsist largely on ground squirrels. Other small mammals up to size of rabbits, arthropods, birds and reptiles are also taken. A fossil species, *T. mexicana*, is known only from the Pliocene Rincon Local Fauna of Chihuahua, Mexico. *T. taxus* itself is also known from Pliocene and Pleistocene rocks of various North American locales. *Taxidea*'s fossil relative, *Pliotaxidea* from the late Miocene, was smaller than *Taxidea*. The type species of *Pliotaxidea*, *P. nevadensis*, was originally named as a new species of *Taxidea* by Butterworth in 1916, but Hall, in 1944, appreciated that it was different enough for its own genus. *Pliotaxidea*'s limb bones show that it was probably as proficient as burrowing and digging as is *Taxidea*.

What is a wolverine?

So famously confused by the layperson with a small bear, the Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) suffered further indignation at the pen of Linnaeus who, it is alleged, could not decide whether *Gulo* should be classed among mustelids or canids. This is supposed to be the reason why *Gulo* is missing from some editions of the *Systema Naturae* - it is not missing because Linnaeus did not know of it, but was deliberately omitted!

Nevertheless, *Gulo* is clearly like weasels and martens in its morphology. In fact, as Grzimek (1975) notes, its dentition is identical to that of martens and one might go so far as stating that it is a giant, terrestrial marten! If this is correct, *Gulo* would perhaps be, like martens, a basal musteline outside of the true weasel-grison group [**UPDATE** Bininda-Emonds et al. (1999) found *Gulo* to be the sister-taxon to the martens]. The alternative is that *Gulo* is derived from the Eurasian-North American ischyrictin *Plesiogulo*, in which case it would be a relictual member of a previously more successful group. The same could be said for *Mellivora* if that genus too is truly derived from its putative ischyrictin ancestor. If wolverines are terrestrial martens, then they became very much bigger than the biggest marten during their evolution. Large specimens of living wolverine may have a total body and tail length of 1.3 m and a weight of 32 kg (Nowak 1983), and Pleistocene wolverines from Europe were considerably larger. A Pleistocene species that is almost certainly ancestral to *Gulo gulo*, *G. schlosseri*, was both smaller than *G. gulo* and apparently not adapted for the same temperate-cold climate (Kurtén 1968).

Wolverines have tremendously robust skulls and have a locking jaw joint reminiscent of that seen in badgers - this being one of the features, incidentally, that some workers have used to unite the two. Wolverines eat carrion, rodents, birds eggs and berries and, mostly in winter, will take ungulates including roe deer, sheep and reindeer. Wolverines are even (anecdotally) credited with the ability to bring down an adult moose, supposedly by jumping on its back from a vantage point in a tree. This appears to be stretching credulity a little too far (an adult moose might weigh as much as 800 kg), but I suppose it might be possible. With this in mind, Bjorn Kurtén (1968) suggested that giant Pleistocene wolverines may correspondingly have been capable of killing animals as large as *Megaloceros*, the giant deer.

With their large, semiplantigrade feet, wolverines can support their weight well on snow-covered surfaces and it has been suggested that they may then have an advantage over potential prey with proportionally smaller feet, like reindeer. They run with a 'sort of loping gallop' (Nowak 1983) and are excellent swimmers and climbers. They climb in the same manner as most other types of carnivoran, with the palms held parallel grasping the sides of the trunk, but the soles kept in line with the long axis of the body.

Weasels, martens and minks

The mustelid subfamily Mustelinae - the weasels, martens, wolverines and related forms - are all predominantly carnivorous, agile animals that are well able to climb, swim, run and dig. Again, their dentition is what distinguishes them best from all other mustelids, and they have the most sectorial dentition out of all members of the group. Both fossil and living forms are geographically widespread, being known from Africa, Asia, Europe and North and South America. Of course, stoats, weasels and polecats have been introduced to Australasia by humans.

Mustelines may be divided up into three major groups, though a number of forms do not fit into this scheme. Ischyrictins, discussed above, are a fossil group whose members have previously been regarded as fossil martens, otters, or as possible ancestors of wolverines or *Mellivora*. **Mustelins** have a distinctively posteriorly expanded auditory bulla - they include true weasels, polecats and the African Zorilla and striped weasels. **Galictins** include the living South American grisons (*Galictis*) and a variety of Asian and North American fossil forms. Some studies on the diversity of living types indicate that things may be more complicated than this three-fold division. In Bininda-Emonds et al's (1999) cladogram, *Poecilogale* occupied an isolated basal position among the mustelines, while the Eurasian Marbled polecat (*Vormela peregusna*) clustered with the two *Ictonyx* species (*I. libyca* and *I. striatus*) at an also isolated basal position. The Patagonian weasel (*Lyncodon patagonicus*) was the most basal member of a large clade that also included the galictins and a Tayra-wolverine-marten clade. The *Mustela* species occupied a separate position on the tree and didn't appear close to any of these other groups - if this is correct, it does not support a monophyletic Mustelini that is distinct from galictins.

Martens (*Martes*) are comparatively large, heavy mustelines that are more arboreal than other members of the group. Their closest relatives are probably wolverines and the Mexican-South American Tayra (*Eira barbara*), an enigmatic forest dwelling species that includes more plant matter in its diet than other mustelines. Up to eight marten species are presently recognised: the subgenera *Pekania* and *Charronia* have been suggested for the Fisher (*M. pennanti*) and the Yellow-throated (*M. flavigula*) and Nigiri (*M. gwatkinsi*) martens respectively, but at various times it has been suggested that several of the eight species (*M. martes*, *M. zibellina*, *M. melampus* and *M. americana*) should be sunk into a single species. Martens have large, bushy tails which serve as rudders when they leap about amongst branches: they are unbelievably agile and can chase and catch squirrels. The Stone or Beech marten (*M. foina*) has moved into towns and cities in parts of Europe and is well known for causing expensive damage to the cables and mechnical parts of cars.

Martes has a confusing fossil record, and appears early in the Lower Miocene of Eurasia. This makes it among the longest lived and most succesful of mammalian genera. The North American early Miocene *Dinogale* is similar and perhaps related to *Martes*. A European Pleistocene species, *M. vetus*, is thought to have been ancestral to *M. martes* and *M. foina* while the large *M. wenzensis*, also from the European Pleistocene, might be closely related to the North American *M. pennanti*.

The **Galictini** are represented today by the South American grisons (*Galictis*), but their fossil history is more complex than this and they apparently originated in Asia during the Miocene, migrated into North America during the late Miocene-Pliocene, and then moved into South America with the formation of the Panamanian isthumus (Ray, Anderson and Webb 1981). Galictins are all small, deep-jawed mustelines and the two living species, *G. vittata* and *G. cuja*, are strikingly patterned in grey and black.

African zorillas and other striped weasels

The three species of **African weasels** are of a problematical phylogenetic position and might be allied with the *Mustela* group (the true weasels and polecats), or be basal mustelines related to galictins. Like galictins, African weasels are boldly patterned in black and white and appear strongly reminiscent of skunks. Like skunks, they squirt foul-smelling secretions from their anal glands.

The largest of these species is the Zorilla (*Ictonyx striatus*), a widespread but poorly known form that preys largely on invertebrates. Zorillas have black underparts and a black and white striped and piebald back and face: they are particularly similar to spotted skunks (*Spilogale*) and Nowak (1983) reports that early writers used to confuse the two. A ridiculous 22 subspecies have been described, but Kingdon (1998) suggests that the species is best divided into three regional groupings: *I. s. striatus* in southern Africa, *I. s. erythrae* of NE and E Africa and *I. s. senegalensis* of W Africa. the latter had spread across the Bering landbride and then become isolated in Eurasia. No study of *Mustela* phylogeny has yet included *M. macrodon*. Nigel Dunstone (1993) reported that

Fig. 3: Striped or White-naped weasel (*Poecilogale albinucha*).

The smaller *Ictonyx*, the North African or Libyan striped weasel (*I. libyca*), was formerly regarded as worthy of its own genus (*Poecilictis* Thomas and Hinton 1920). Its markings are quite variable but it tends to have much longer fur on the back than the Zorilla. The Striped or White-naped weasel (*Poecilogale albinucha*) is a remarkably elongate species with proportionally large canines and a very wide gape. Kingdon (1998) notes that, in the way it moves, it is very reminiscent of a snake (this may not be a coincidence). It has been regarded as a specialised rodent predator, paralysing prey by holding the prey's head in its mouth while raking downwards with its feet, but also takes insects, snakes and small birds. The fossil musteline *Baranogale*, apparently closely related to *Ictonyx*, was present in Europe during the Pleistocene and indicates that African weasels migrated out of Africa at this time.

True weasels and polecats

True weasels and polecats, the 16 members of the genus *Mustela*, are the most speciose and widespread of all mustelids today. All are highly predatory, agile terrestrial mustelids with tubular bodies suited for chasing rodents and other small mammals through burrows and undergrowth. Some species routinely climb trees however, and the two minks (*M. lutreola* and *M. vison*), the recently extinct Sea mink (*M. macrodon*), the Amazonian weasel (*M. africana*) and possibly the Colombian weasel (*M. felipei*) are or were semiaquatic predators of aquatic life. *Mustela* is essentially a Eurasian genus that has moved into tropical SE Asia and Indonesia (the species *M. nudipes* and *M. lutreolina*), as well as into the Americas.

Fig. 4: Reconstruction of the recently extinct Sea mink (*Mustela macrodon*).

During the Pleistocene, a number of northern species adapted to life in a seasonally snowy climate where rodent prey were now living in burrows beneath the snow - they both became miniaturised and evolved a winter change in their coat colour, turning from brown to white. David Macdonald (1992) suggests that the three species that did this, *M. nivalis* (Least or Common weasel), *M. erminea* (Stoat) and *M. frenata* (Long-tailed weasel), might be termed the 'snow weasel' lineage. Another group - the polecats - appear to have enlarged in size and may descend from *M. stromeri*, a diminutive form from Pleistocene Europe that seems intermediate between true weasels and polecats. Another Pleistocene form from Europe, named the Giant polecat (*M. robusta*) by Newton in 1899, was perhaps 10% larger than living polecats (*M. putorius*) and with a wider, shorter skull. *M. robusta* is, however, so like *M. putorius* that it may not be a good species, and the smaller size of living polecats may represent post-Pleistocene dwarfing. 6During the Pliocene, *Mustela* invaded North America and there evolved a number of endemic forms including the tiny Least weasel (*M. nivalis rixosa* - regarded by some authorities as a separate species from other populations of *M. nivalis*), the Black-footed ferret (*M. nigripes*) and the marine **Sea mink** (*M. macrodon*). The latter species, known only from the coasts of New England and Canada, was large and plump and reached 82 cm in total length (making it the largest known member of the genus). It had coarser, more reddish fur than other minks. No complete specimen or skin is known and there is hardly any information on its habits, life history or life appearance; bones and accounts from the skin trade are all we have. Like other marine mammals of the North American coast, it may have also lived along the coasts of NE Asia, though (to my knowledge) there are no reports from this region of any creature that can be clearly identified as this species. Sadly, Sea minks were much sought after for their pelt, and were not recorded after 1880 (Nowak 1983, Day 1989).

A specialist that lived alongside and hunted prarie dogs (*Cynomys*), **Black-footed ferrets** were apparently first regarded as fictional when the ornithologist and artist John Audubon included one in the background of a painting (Macdonald 1992). Following their official discovery, the ferrets suffered from the heavy persecution of their prey and were feared extinct during the early decades of the 20th century. A population was, however, discovered in South Dakota in 1964 from which individuals were taken for an (unsuccesful) captive breeding programme. Sightings of this population ceased in 1974, and the ferret was thought extinct once more, though occasional reports continued. Official rediscovery then occurred in 1981 when a Wyoming specimen was killed by a dog. Intensive captive breeding since then has resulted in several captive colonies. *M. nigripes* is very similar - indeed, sometimes almost identical in external appearance - to the Asian steppe polecat (*M. eversmanni*), its probable ancestor. Anderson (1973) suggested that all three polecats (*M. eversmanni*, *M. nigripes* and *M. putorius*) might actually represent only a single species. Fossil *M. nigripes* are known from 24 Pleistocene and Holocene sites of the western USA, Alberta and Saskatchewan. As noted by Pamela Owen and Christopher Bell (1998), some of the very oldest *M. nigripes* fossils known are not found associated with *Cynomys* colonies (the younger ones are). An *M. nigripes* fossil from Cathedral Cave, Nevada, was associated instead with fossil ground squirrels of the genus *Spermophilus*. Maybe, therefore, *M. nigripes* first evolved to prey on these 'ordinary' ground squirrels, and only later switched to preying on prairie dogs. *Mustela* also moved into South America with the opening of the Panamanian landbridge during the late Pliocene. One of the most poorly known of all living mustelids, the Colombian weasel (*M. felipei*), was only discovered in 1951 (and not described and named until 1979). Webbing between the toes of both *M. felipei* and the probably related Amazonian weasel (*M. africana* - despite its scientific name it is not from Africa!) suggest aquatic habits, though this has yet to be confirmed in *M. felipei* by direct observation.

Fig. 5: Two representatives of the genus *Martes*: Pine marten (*M. martes*) above, Beech or Stone marten (*M. foina*) below.

Most considerations of *Mustela* evolution have regarded the three polecats as the subgenus *Putorius* and the three minks as the subgenus *Lutreola*. The Colombian weasel has also been placed within the subgenus *Grammogale*, originally regarded as a genus and created for the Amazonian tropical weasel (*M. africana*). Monophyly of *Putorius* and *Grammogale* have been supported in a number of recent analyses of mustelid phylogeny (Youngman 1982, Dunstone 1993, Bininda-Emonds et al. 1999) but recent workers agree that the two living mink species are not close relatives, but in fact members of two entirely different mustelin lineages. Kurten (1968) had previously proposed that European minks had evolved from American ones as a population of the latter had spread across the Bering landbride and then become isolated in Eurasia.

No study of *Mustela* phylogeny has yet included *M. macrodon*. Nigel Dunstone (1993) reported that

Mustela could be divided into four main groups; the ***putorius*** group for the three polecats; the ***lutreola*** group for the Kolinsky or Siberian weasel (*M. sibirica*) and European mink (*M. lutreola*), the ***mustela*** group for the Long-tailed weasel (*M. frenata*), Mountain weasel (*M. altaica*), Stoat (*M. erminea*) and Weasel (*M. nivalis*), and the ***vison*** group for the American mink (*M. vison*). Dunstone (1993) suggested that the Amazonian weasel might be closely related to *M. vison* (in which case *M. felipei* might be too).

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THE CIA: A CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY?

BY NICK REDFERN.

Established on 26 July 1947 by President Harry Truman as a result of the passing of the United States Government's National Security Act, the Central Intelligence Agency (America's first peace-time intelligence-based organisation) had its origins in the wartime Office of Strategic Services and the Central Intelligence Group. Although any mention of the CIA inevitably conjures up images of sinister-looking characters conducting covert espionage operations; political assassinations; and 'James Bond'-like escapades the truth isn't always quite like that. Granted, the CIA's history has at times been both dark and controversial, but it has to be said that for the most part, CIA employees do not run around the world with gorgeous girls on their arms whilst ordering their drinks "shaken and not stirred" and simultaneously saving the planet from some deranged madman *a la* 007! However, there is substantial evidence to show that in addition to the typical activities that one would expect to find the CIA implicated in, the Agency has at various times since its creation, been involved in a host of bizarre affairs – some of a distinctly cryptozoological nature. Before addressing such matters, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the CIA has investigated and put together files on numerous *X-Files*-style topics, including: UFOs; Noah's Ark; 'mind-control' and hypnosis; black magic; remote viewing, and more – indeed, via the terms of the American Freedom of Information Act, many files relative to the above controversies have now been de-classified into the public domain. Of course, there is a high degree of suspicion that the released files on all of the above topics only represent a very small fraction of a massive iceberg...

But what of cryptozoology? Startling it may seem but the history of the CIA involves giant snakes; the Yeti and its U.S. cousin Bigfoot; and even Vampires!! For example, there is a story in which CIA personnel based in Bolivia in the late 1950s learned from a local cattle rancher of a huge snake – no less than 10 metres in length – that was holed up in a cave and that had eaten at least 10 of the local populace! For the next few months at cocktail parties at the U.S. Embassy in Bolivia the story of the snake would surface and eventually plans were formulated to capture the beast. According to one CIA agent ('Lee'), this involved firing tear gas into the snake's lair and luring it out. Other agents surrounded the entrance to the cave with a huge sack that had zippers attached to either end. The plan was that, when the snake came shooting out, it would fly down the length of the bag, the agents would quickly zip it up and all would be well. Needless to say, things did not quite go according to plan...

Getting the snake into the sack was apparently not the problem; but keeping it in there certainly was! Thrashing around, the snake easily split the sack wide open and, to the horror of the CIA team, a 30 foot-plus snake loomed into view, Pandemonium broke loose. According to Lee, the snake caught his eye and launched itself in his direction. Acting almost on pure instinct alone, Lee fired off a volley of shots into the creature's brain. It fell dead to the floor. On measuring it, the snake's length was found to be 33 feet and 3 inches! *"Lee, you're a damned liar,"* said David Atlee Phillips, a colleague of Lee's when told this fantastic tale later. Despite the fact that Lee had had the presence of mind to save the skin of the snake as a trophy and duly showed the evidence to Phillips, Phillips still doubted Lee's version of how he came into possession of the snake skin. That is, until he had a conversation at a Washington party with Darwin Bell, the deputy assistant secretary for international labour affairs. *"Did you know Lee?"* Phillips asked. *"Certainly did. Knew Lee well,"* replied Bell. Spurred on by this Phillips recounted the snake story to Bell, whilst admitting that he found it extremely hard to believe. *"To this day,"* said Phillips, *"he claims they made a canvas sack with zippers at both ends. Now, did you ever hear anything about that?"* *"Mr Phillips,"* replied Bell, *"certainly have heard about that. I was the tail zipper man."*

Giant snakes aside, what about the Yeti and Bigfoot links? Jack "Kewaunee" Lapseritis, M.S., is the author a 1998 book entitled *The Psychic Sasquatch*.

In his book, Lapseritis posits a UFO link with the Bigfoot mystery and is certain that whatever these creatures are, they are not simply the result of sightings of some shambling surviving relic of a bygone age. In his book, Lapseritis cites the case of a family that had a series of Bigfoot-UFO encounters in the Rocky Mountains in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

The result? Inquiries from the CIA who showed a distinct interest in their experiences. The story is far beyond the scope of this article, but anyone who wants to learn about this case would be wise to invest in a copy of Lapseritis's book. In the book he also relates the facts pertaining to a similar event.

To quote Lapseritis: *"After giving a lecture in Los Angeles in 1994, a well-educated man cautiously approached me... he began by saying, 'Are you aware that everything you stated in your lecture about a Bigfoot /UFO connection is true and that the CIA knows all about it?'"*

The man went on to state that a friend of his who was a psychic had been recruited by the CIA to actually try and locate a Bigfoot! Supposedly, one such creature was captured when it was knocked down by a U.S. Army jeep – an action that barely injured the creature but that allowed the authorities to capture it and determine its other-worldy origin.

According to Lapseritis: *"It is the job of the CIA to investigate any unusual activity going on in this country where national security is involved. The Sasquatch and space beings come under the heading of 'Unknowns'; therefore, the continuing reports about both are enough to keep agency officials wondering."*

Despite the seemingly incredible nature of this account, it is a fact that the CIA has employed the use of psychics for intelligence-gathering operations and there does seem to be some evidence to support the notion that U.S. authorities do take note of "Big Hairy Men" reports. For example, it has long been rumoured that some of the expeditions to Tibet in search of the Yeti attracted far more than passing interest on the part of the CIA – almost certainly because of the strategic location of Tibet. (Curiously, this was something briefly mentioned in Billy Wilder's film, *The Private Life Of Sherlock Holmes*).

Similarly, in his 1991 book, *Alien Liaison*, British author Timothy Good relates the story of a family that had a truly bizarre set of experiences on a Colorado-based ranch in the mid-1970s, involving Bigfoot encounters, UFO and alien encounters (some of almost a "Contactee" type), and animal mutilations. According to Good, one of those involved, "Jim", learned during a discussion about the mutilations with an officer at a nearby airbase that:

"... the base had had its share of troublesome UFO incidents, and that directives existed on how to deal with them. The officer also asked Jim if he had experienced any trouble with 'Bigfoot'. Apparently, the Air Force had directives on these elusive creatures, too."

Again, this sounds both bizarre and incredible; however, it is an indisputable fact that at least *some* BHM accounts do feature in official files – one case being that of the notorious *'Minnesota Iceman'*.

As those who have followed this debate will be aware, in the late 1960s, Frank Hansen, a Minnesota farmer, claimed to have in his possession a hairy, man-like creature which was preserved in a block of ice, having been found floating in the sea off Siberia. Supposedly, the creature had been purchased by an anonymous Californian millionaire, who made arrangements for Hansen to exhibit it.

Investigators Ivan Sanderson and Bernard Heuvelmans made for Hansen's farm in December

1968, and on seeing the creature declared it genuine. Unfortunately, before a scientific study could be undertaken, the corpse was returned to its anonymous owner, and an elaborate latex copy was substituted. And there are, of course, claims that there never was a 'real' body, only the model. But that is hardly the issue. In 1970, Hansen recalled the tremendous interest that his creature had created, particularly in official circles: *"I became extremely nervous when the newspaper in both the U.S. and England pointed out that 'if these creature is real, then there may be the question of how and why it was killed...' The Federal Bureau of Investigation and hordes of lesser law enforcement officials revealed a sudden, ominous interest in my specimen."*

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In later years, Frank Hansen expanded on this. Recalling the heady days of the 1960s when his 'specimen' was on display, he stated: "*...my good friend Sheriff George Ford of Winona County showed up and said*: 'Frank, would you believe I got an inquiry from Mr Brewer at the FBI office in Rochester who has received a letter from J. Edgar Hoover asking for him to find out what's in that coffin...I'll be back tomorrow with a pathologist, I've got to answer this enquiry for Mr Brewer...'"

Hansen did not wait around for the authorities to show up: '*The whole world was looking for this thing and we were heading down Interstate 94 toward Chicago!*' The image of the FBI in hot pursuit of Hansen and his frozen friend boggles the mind, but I would refer you to the above to point out that there is testimony (and documentation) available demonstrating a link between accounts of BHM and U.S. Government agencies. Giant snakes and hairy, man-like creatures aside, what about the Vampire link with the CIA? During the 1950s, when the rebellion in the Philippines was taking place, U.S. Air Force General Edward Lansdale (who was also head of CIA Psychological Operations or *PsyOps* as they are known) carefully exploited the legends of the Philippine vampires to scare the Huk rebels away from their bases of operation. The *Ausang* (as the Vampires were known) terrified the local populace – something that the CIA was acutely aware of and exploited to the hilt. For example, when a Huk patrol was located, CIA agents specially trained would capture and kill the last man. Two holes would be punctured in his neck and he would be hung upside down to drain the blood from his body. The corpse would then be left where it would be sure to be found by his terrified comrades. Moreover, there is good evidence to show that this particularly ingenious CIA operation succeeded in driving the Huks out of the areas where they feared the *Ausang* lurked and of course, minimising their effectiveness

Cryptozoologists have spent decades exploring the wilds of South America, Africa, the great forests of Washington and the Australian outback in search of fantastic creatures and beasts; it would be ironic if the hard evidence for the existence of such creatures were to be found buried in the vaults of one of America's most secretive intelligence agencies!

SOURCES:

The Agency, John Ranelagh, Sceptre Books, 1987; The Night Watch, David Atlee Phillips, Atheneum Books, 1977; The Psychic Battlefield, W. Adam Mandelbaum, Vision Books, 2000; Alien Liaison, Timothy Good, Century Books, 1991; The FBI Files, Nick Redfern, Simon & Schuster Books, 1998. The Psychic Sasquatch, Jack Lapseritis, Wildflower Press, 1998.

NEWSFILE XTRA:

THE FATHER OF CRYPTOZOOLOGY RETIRES

Editor`s note: The following translation of an article in *Le Temps* on the 8th October 1999 was sent to us by our good friend and Swiss correspondent Sunila Sen Gupta. We print this together with the photographs which are © *Musee cantonal de zoologie of Lausanne* as a tribute to the the man without whose work none of us would be doing what we do now!

FOR MYTHICAL ANIMAL HUNTERS, ALL TRACKS LEAD TO LAUSANNE

It's rather rare to have the pleasure to listen to an acknowledged scientist commenting at length about a picture of Nessie, the Loch Ness monster.

This occasion occurred on Friday at the *Musee cantonal de zoologie of Lausanne* and will certainly take place again. The institution has just received the sum of fifty years of research by Bernhard Heuvelmans, a universally known scientist, now retired and founder of the science of cryptozoology (from the greek 'kryptos' meaning hidden)., a serious discipline that studies animals whose existence isn't proven.

Bernhard Heuvelmans, a Belgian who already had a PhD in science at the age of 23, analysed stories, drawings, photos, tracks, bones and other testimonies that make up a frame of proofs establishing the existence of a beast. He has applied rigorously scientific methods to a content on which there was a doubt: the Yeti and other SHH (Savage and Hairy Humans), the dragon, the giant squid and sea serpents, that navigate on the frontier between realism and fantasy until the day of their possible discovery.

This world-wide unique treasure, mainly comprises documents, notably some hundred archive boxes containing 25,000 original files, as many photos, a map file, a rich correspondence and a library of 2500 books

dealing as much about zoology than cryptozoology. *"Because to be a good cryptozoologist , one needs to be a good zoologist"* underlines Daniel Cherix, assistant curator of the museum.

On Wednesday 13 October 1999, the museum will open a showcase retracing the work accomplished by Heuvelmans.

An extraordinary personality, the Belgian zoologist lives in Paris and has translated a lot of zoology treatises. He has been a comedian, a jazz musician at the time of Boris Vian, and has written numerous works, among which a best-seller in 1955 "On the Track of Unknown Animals"

His approach is close to that of mainstream zoology researchers since numerous animals believed to be mythical have been discovered alive: the Giant Squid in 1870, the Okapi in 1901, the Komodo Dragon in 1912, and the Coelacanth. It's fossil imprints showed that it had lived some 200,000,000 years ago. In 1938, a researcher spotted one of these fish on a market place in Mozambique. This lady noticed on this occasion that the local people had been catching and eating this fish for a long time. One of the beasts that has occupied Heuvelmans a lot is certainly the one called "the Pongoid Man" a wild "humanid" that was found dead during the Vietnam War and was flown to the States in the time of the repatriation of American soldiers. Imprisoned in a block of ice, this primate could be observed and photographed during 3 days by Heuvelmans and his scientist friend Sanderson, before the FBI decided to make it disappear. Some of the cryptozoology stories are reminiscent of the adventures of Mulder and Scully with the aliens in the TV series "X-Files".

"Heuvelmans is the guarantee for the scientific authenticity of his discipline, we'll have to be very attentive to the pieces that will be sent to us for the completion of our data, fakes are abundant." explains Michel Sartori, curator of the zoology museum.

Aged 83, retired in his home near Paris, Heuvelmans doesn't want to appear in public anymore. If he donated his work to the Lausanne museum, it's out of friendship for it's assistant curator, Daniel Cherix, whom he met in 1985 in Lausanne. *"He simply said: if you're interested, I'm donating my archives to you. It's clear that by accepting them we are recognising the seriousness of his work"* says D. Cherix.

In charge of maintaining, completing and keeping this new "cryptozoology department" at the disposal of the scientific community, the curator M. Sartori hopes to have the means to face this challenge. Because even if the fund is neatly put away in two small rooms of the museum, everything must be archived and the iconography must be put on a different medium. *"This will need several years of work for a person"*. The curator hopes that with the upcoming reorganisation of the institution by the year 2005, he'll be able to give more space to cryptozoology, of which Lausanne is now the capital.

The Owlman Returns (sort of)

I saw this monster
bird last night. It
flood like a man
then it flew up
Brought the trees
It is as big as a man. Its eyes are red and
shine brightly
Sally Chapman 4/7/76

As regular readers of this magazine and my scribblings elsewhere in the fortean press will know, I have long been fascinated with the enduring mystery of the Cornish Owlman. Indeed back in issue six we printed the first eyewitness testimony from a witness who has asked only to be named as 'Gavin', and both this magazine and the Centre for Fortean Zoology have been studying the phenomenon for many years.

In 1997 I wrote a book, *The Owlman and Others* and earlier this year we even released a very silly spoof art movie with the same name with little relevance to the main body of the research that the CFZ both collectively and individually has carried out into this phenomenon.

Our ridiculous film has gathered a fair amount of press coverage, and as a result the Owlman is back in the public eye again. Also in May we made contact again with our old friend and mentor Tony "Doc" Shiels who told us, (quite possibly tongue in cheek or maybe not) that the feathered monster had been seen again.

In early July, we received the following e-mail. In view of the history of hoaxing and surrealchemical shenanigans surrounding his Owliness we print it with no comment apart from the obvious one that IF it is true it turns much of what I have written and said publicly about the phenomenon in recent years completely on its head.

Sufficient to say, the story of the Owlman of Mawnan ain't over yet!

JON DOWNES

My Experience of 3/7/1976
Sally G

Pembroke, Wales
July 2000

To whom it may concern,

Writing this down isn't going to be the easiest thing that I've ever done, so I'll try to get it over with as quickly as possible. I have reluctantly decided to speak on my experience, for reasons that I won't go into here. This is the first time that I have thought about any part of what happened during that summer in years- It took me quite a while to really forget about what I saw, and I suppose you could say that it had a definite effect on the way that I lived my life for a number of years following the event. I am a 38-year old career woman who has quite enough going on in her life without dredging up a very upsetting incident that happened 24 years ago.

years ago. This is certainly the first time that I have written any of this down, and probably the first time that I have wilfully remembered it in any detail since I was a teenager. I recently mentioned it in passing to someone whom I am very fond of, and he suggested that I contact you, having found you on the net. I am aware of some of the bits and pieces that have been written about my experience in the intervening years, and by-and-large I have no complaint. I remember Mr Shiels as being quite concerned about my friend Barbara and I at the time. He seemed like a nice man.

I have read the essay on your website concerning the incident. There are a couple of indiscrepancies that you weren't to know about that I should probably clear up. My name wasn't really Chapman at the time- it was W***, although I told Mr Shiels that it was Chapman. Babs gave her real name. You'll probably understand why I did this. I was still VERY upset when Babs and I were walking on the beach the next day. Babs was much more grown-up than me at the time (and probably still is). She was calming me down, trying to make me laugh, because I hadn't slept a wink the night before. She walked up to Tony and told him what had happened. I have no idea how she knew of him, but I gather he was a bit of a local character. I didn't really know that part of Cornwall at all

He had some paper and pencils on him, and had us draw it. He helped me so much that day without even realising it-I remember him making me giggle a bit, and he was so cheery that he really snapped me out of it. I don't think either drawing was particularly good- I'm not really sure that it was as OWLLY as our pictures suggested. I've just realised that I've been stalling actually describing what happened when we were in the wood that night. This thing STILL has an effect on me all these years later. It was probably around 9.45pm when we saw it. We had made tea with a little camping stove, and I seem to remember that we were talking about school and boys. There was a boy at home that I was very interested in, and Babs wanted to know all about it. Neither of us had had boyfriends before at that point. It was still light. I seem to remember that it hadn't rained for ages, and the woods were very dry and crunchy, if that makes sense. The noise was so abrupt in the quiet of the woods that we both jumped up together. It was a kind of hissing. I don't know, I can't really remember. It was loud and sudden. We both looked over into the wood, and there it was.

I had been to see a horror film in Plymouth a few months before, a werewolf film with Peter Cushing. This was the first thing I thought when I saw it, I thought it was the werewolf. The face wasn't really like an owl, thinking back. It was like a frowning, sneering black thing. The eyes were burning, glaring and reddish. I don't know if it had fur or feathers, but it was gray and grizzled like the werewolf in the film. I remember hearing Barbara start to laugh, but it was a sort of choked, panicked laugh. Tony Shiels did us a great favour by playing down our fear when he talked about what happened to us later on. I think when we saw him that day on the beach that he must have known how upset we really were. I knew right away it was REAL. It wasn't like a monster in the films that look rubbery and fake. It just looked like a very weird, frightening animal, as real as any animal in a zoo. It looked flesh and blood to me, but there is simply no way it could have been. It couldn't have been something that was born and grew. No way. I have no idea what it was. My head hurts even thinking about it.

It was more frightening than I can really describe. I remember blood rushing to my head, making it pound. It just stood there for what might have been a minute. I'm not really sure how long. Barbara was laughing, but it was more like a sort of breathless hysterical sound by now. I wanted to run but couldn't. It was so EVIL, intensely so. When it moved, that nearly did it, I nearly started running. It's arms or wings or whatever went out, and it just rose up through the trees. Straight up through the evergreens, it didn't flap, it didn't make a sound. Then, weirdly, I thought 'costume' for the first time, because the legs looked wrong. They looked like a kind of grey trouser material, certainly unnatural. I can't be entirely sure now. And then the feet. Black, hooking things. I have no idea how it had managed to stand up on them. They were like an earwig's tail-piece.

It's difficult trying to remember exactly what happened next. The wood was quiet, but it felt as if it, the thing, could appear again at any second. I think I had nearly fainted at one point. Babs was the same. We were shaking like leaves. I was thinking that someone was going to come out of the woods laughing at their trick, but really I knew that it couldn't possibly have been a trick. On one level, my mind simply wasn't accepting it. It still doesn't in a way. That's how I got over it, I think. By pretending that it hadn't really happened. As I mentioned earlier, in some ways I lost a lot of years to it. Somehow, shaking and crying a bit, we got packed up. That was the worst time, waiting for it to come back. I don't think that I could have coped seeing it again. My mind was POUNDING, ballooning. I don't know how it could have disappeared like it did. The woods weren't that thick. Not thick enough to hide what I can only think of as a monster. I know that sounds silly, but it is perhaps the most apt way to describe it. It seemed to just vanish, like a ghost.

We were originally going to walk back to Babs' home, near Gweek, but it was pretty much dark by now. Obviously as an adult you question why you stayed out, but that's what we did. We moved camp to a place where the woods were thinner, as I recall. I didn't sleep a wink, and neither did Babs I suppose. Yet somehow I knew it was gone for good. The atmosphere was lighter somehow, there were bird noises coming out of the trees, calls and the like. The night crawled by, and eventually it started to get light. We made tea at about six or so, and went for a walk down on the beach around nine. We met Tony Shiels, and told our story.

I really don't know why I decided to write all this down, after so many years. As I have said, someone close to me thought that I should come clean. Actually, doing so has affected me less than I thought it was going to. Reading over it, I feel a little embarrassed. It doesn't seem possible now. I have no idea why or how it happened. I never expect to.

I moved with my family from West Hoe in Plymouth in 1980 to Surrey, and then on to Pembroke to work in a creative role in 1989. I believe that what happened in July '76 shaped my life for years afterwards.

My good friend Barbara emigrated with her husband to Australia in 1987. I haven't spoken to her in many years, but I think that I would hear if anything had happened.

That's about it, really. For what it's worth, I haven't been to Cornwall since I was a teenager. Whatever happened that July is firmly in the past, and I intend to leave it there.

THE CFZ BIG FISH PROJECT

INTRODUCING THE BIG FISH PROJECT

It has been suggested by many folklorists that an integral part of the ethos of a big lake is a lake monster. Indeed we at the CFZ have published lists of monster haunted stretches of water which span the globe. Monsters have even been reported from stretches of water where there are sound zoological reasons that no enormous animals could possibly exist. Unfortunately this has been used by some observers to suggest that all lake monsters are fallacious. This is almost certainly not true.

Over the years that the CFZ has been in existence we have begun to notice another, equally valid, but so far overlooked fortean phenomenon. In the same way that large stretches of water are often said to be haunted by giant animals, more modest sized waters are often also said to have mythic inhabitants.

The stories of fish, unusual either because of their ferocity or their size haunting small ponds. Rivers and canals are legion. The annals of forteana and indeed of mainstream literature are full of such accounts. In his remarkable book *Mysteries* John Blashford-Snell describes on such series of events from the mid 1970s when soldiers under his command were called to deal with the predations of a particularly large perch which was terrorising the village pond in a sleepy

part of rural England. Renowned children's author Arthur Ransome also wrote of extraordinary fish. His book *The Big Six* includes a sub plot about the catching of a massive pike before the war on the Norfolk Broads.

Even in my local canal near Tiverton there are stories of a massive Carp which is often seen but never caught, and I have a sneaking suspicion that these stories have their analogues across the world. On several occasions we have printed accounts of large sturgeon being caught, or found dead, in a lake where monsters have been reported over the years and no doubt we shall continue to do so.

Our friend and Danish correspondent Erik Sorenson recently sent us the photographs of outsized pike that accompany these two pieces, and they prompted us to start a new CFZ project. This is an attempt to collate as many stories of these 'mini monsters' as we can possibly find. We hope to be able to draw some interesting parallels between these stories and those which are told all around the world of more fearsome lake, river and sea monsters. JON DOWNES

HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF GIANT PIKE

On November 6th 1497 a gigantic pike was captured in a pond near Kaiserslauten, Germany. Contemporary records state it was 19 *schuh* long. A *schuh* is literally the length of a shoe. I am no expert on the shoe size of 15th century Germans but common sense dictates that the fish must have been of a remarkable size. It bore a golden ring about its neck commemorating the date it was put in the pond, 1230. Making the piscine giant 267 years old!

The legends attached to the pike are many but most often involve size and ferocity. One has only to look at the almost crocodilian jaws of the fish pictured in Erik's photographs to realise that a big pike could inflict a fatal bite on a human.

To my knowledge this has never happened but one case that showed the pike's strength and savagery allegedly occurred in 1983 at Sir James Steel Park, Washington, Tyne and Wear. A swimming dog was supposedly attacked by a 35lb pike that bit off three of its legs!

Another pike, weighing 29 lbs was found dead having tried to swallow a whole 6 lb carp in Godmanchester in 1990. Other tales tell of attacks on adult swans and the legs of bathers. Author Cliff Temblow took this to extremes in his horror novel

"The Pike" that involves a great white sized man eating pike terrorising Lake Windermere during the holiday season. It reads like a fresh water "Jaws".

The largest pike official caught in Britain was 44 lbs but larger specimens may be awaiting bold anglers. David Gale and two of his colleagues from the Dudley diving club were surveying Norton Mere a lake on the Earl of Bradford's estate in Weston-under-Lizard in 1973, when they encountered a large animal underwater. The creature threw up a massive disturbance and left a large wake. The men believed they had encountered a gigantic pike.

In a new CFZ project we are now collecting accounts of giant pike and their attacks on humans and animals. If you know of any such tales both in Britain or abroad please let us know as we are thinking of investigating some of them first hand. And the next time you feel inclined to sail your toy yacht on the village pond just think of what might be waiting down there! RICHARD FREEMAN

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please send all information you have, be it

- Documentary evidence from angling clubs
- Folkloric reports
- Pictures or even preserved specimens
- Newspaper cuttings

To

The Big Fish Project
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ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE ISN'T EVIDENCE OF ABSENCE

Martin E. Jenkins

Back in the 1950s, Waveney Girvan observed that scientists would not believe that a monster was alive in Loch Ness until it was found dead on the shore.[1] Nowadays, some cryptozoologists seem similarly bothered by the lack of bodies. They show considerable interest in the hypothesis of what Jonathan Downes calls "zooform phenomena."[2] As Tony Healy and Paul Cropper describe it, this hypothesis argues that some cryptids (especially alien big cats (ABCs) *"though real enough, sometimes, to be seen, to leave tracks and to kill animals, are not entirely 'real' in the usual sense of the word ... they are some kind of psychic phenomenon."*[3])

As a fortean, I cannot reject out of hand the possibility that mystery animals blink in and out of bodily existence. (It does, however, remind me of a friend's version of Descartes: *"He thinks, therefore he is. At least, he thinks sometimes and keeps flashing off, and off".*) However, in some cases it seems that the hypothesis is being adopted out of desperation, because there is no physical evidence for cryptids.

Healy and Cropper put what appears to be the strongest case for the hypothesis. *"Like all normal Australian animals, they* [ABCs] *should be killed by cars, trains, shooters and poison baits on a regular basis."*[4] In a talk at UnCONvention 1999, Tony Healy suggested that the same argument applies to Bigfoot: by now, somebody ought to have managed to shoot a sasquatch.

In fact, as I intend to show, there is nothing surprising in the absence of dead ABCs (sasquatches, yowies, lake monsters, etc). Statistically, it is exactly what we would expect. The argument from lack of corpses probably says more about how little we understand of ourselves as human beings than it does about cryptids.

Let's look at the sasquatch. Surely, by now, some American hunter should have put a bullet in one. After all, the USA is a densely populated country with a large number of hunters.

Well, actually, no. The USA has a population of 27 people per square kilometre.[5] It is more densely populated than Australia (2 per square kilometre), but if you want a point of comparison try Afghanistan (24 per square kilometre). The idea of a relict hominid population in the Afghan mountains sounds perfectly plausible. Why not in the equally sparsely populated USA?

Except that the USA is not as sparsely populated as Afghanistan, but more so. Afghanistan is a less urbanised society than America. Most Americans live in towns and cities, leaving the wilderness uncluttered with humanity. To put this in context, Great Britain is also a highly urbanised society. Over 80% of its population lives in towns, but it still manages a density of 234 per square kilometre. Despite this, it includes, especially in Scotland, significant areas of more or less uninhabited wilderness. The USA is best defined as vast tracts of open space - whether farmed or wilderness - punctuated by occasional pockets of overcrowded humanity.

Every year, of course, vast numbers of those overcrowded human beings take to the woods to hunt. One of them, by now, ought to have shot a sasquatch - oughtn't they?

Yes, if they were serious hunters, but they are in fact acting out the myth of the self-reliant American frontiersman. They, on the whole, take with them sufficient food (and beer) to last the trip, and are more likely to pollute the wildlife to death than to shoot it. Their knowledge of what they are hunting is limited. John Steinbeck recorded that one farmer, at the start of the hunting season, used to paint COW on the side of his livestock.

- *"but the hunters shot it anyway."*

As for the chances of hitting anything. Many American hunters couldn't, as was said of George Custer, *"hit a tent from inside."*[7] At the battle of the Rosebud in 1876 the American army fired, at a compact mass of attacking Sioux, 25,000 rounds of ammunition - and hit 25 of the enemy.[8]

On the other side of the equation, we have a hypothetical hominid. Its population is small (a few thousand, as against the millions of deer that roam the USA). It is presumably, if not actively intelligent, highly experienced in evading human beings, which it knows to be dangerous. It has had decades to learn to avoid cars, trains and men with guns. It probably has a good idea when the hunting season starts and which parts of the wilderness are beyond the range of urban hunters.

Cryptids are, if real, going to belong to small populations. Healy and Cropper suggest that *"if even half the reports are correct the country [Australia] would be practically overrun with large cats."*[9] Actually, they cite fewer reports in their book than appear in the annual *Fortean Times* ABC round-up for Britain. Cryptid reports tend to appear numerous because out-of-place animals are more likely to be reported. Big cats, in particular, are not going to generate large populations: predator populations are always small in comparison to those of their prey. I do not wish to rubbish the "zooform hypothesis" in itself. I may have strengthened it by helping to detach it from an argument which does not hold water. What I have said about Bigfoot is true of ABCs and any other cryptid you care to name: the chances of a member of a small population being killed - accidentally or deliberately - by an urbanised human being are next to zero.

I do, however, want to put forward an alternative hypothesis: that our failure to find physical evidence

of cryptids may lie firmly in the deficiencies of how we have looked for it and who has looked for it

Fortean researchers (myself included) tend on the whole to be urban humans, skilled in analysing written and oral material. We are not, on the whole, trackers or otherwise skilled in wilderness lore, nor do we always understand animal behaviour. Neil Arnold's account of his search for the beast of Bluebell Hill must make a countryman's heart sink [10] (His subsequent account of a sighting reinforces this view: everything happened by chance [11] The first witness happened to be Neil's uncle; what followed relied on the ABC staying in the area as if waiting to be spotted.) If cryptids are real, they will be found by analysing their behaviour, so that we know not just where they have been seen but also where they are likely to be found, and by estimating the physical search to someone who knows how to track and read signs and move as stealthily as the creature they are looking for.

It is possible that, one day, a serious hunter with real tracking skills will look for and find a sasquatch, but as long as the tracking is done by urban amateurs, the sasquatch can sleep easy in its den.

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Creatures from The Kentish County

by Neil Arnold

When Charles Fort gathered an abundance of data from newspapers in times past, and compiled them to form a series of books which are now regarded as classics, little did he know that his research would influence people like myself, within a field that has now grown so huge. The fortean realm was once as obscure as the mysteries it occasionally oozed, but as this article proves, even the most petite of quirks, can become so relevant as the years wear on.

Charles Fort briefly listed the snippets he discovered, and many a time he never attempted to explain their status. Indeed, whilst many of his finds may well have been rationally explained, he obviously felt that each yarn was peculiar enough to become catalogued.

The world of monsters, strange creatures and nefarious demons is one that often lacks concrete evidence, and yet it always appears as very appealing; simple lists are often just as adequate as exhaustive data. Cryptozoology, and the general topic of animal oddness, stems from the magic of rumour, lore and folktale. Stories presented are often fallible, at times lacking detail, and most certainly brief. Such characteristics though, still make for exciting reading. This is not to say that it is valid to accept every monster story, or every report of an out-of-place animal, but as was the case with Fort's work, it

spawned a thousand theorists, who to this day refer to his work and still try to work out just what really happened in those weird tales.

Living in rural Kent has brought me into contact with all manner of strange, animal legends. Some do not stretch any farther than a few sentences, and yet they remain far more enthralling than certain other tales which I may have a comprehensive amount of information on. As the years pass, I continue to discover more and more reports, and whilst some are rather shallow offerings, I believe that they deserve to be listed, almost in a Charles Fort kind of way.

I have many tales to share with you, many dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century. These are reports that simply prove that such enigmas have always existed, but have been wiped from the conscience by the effects of war and unemployment.

Unfortunately, there are thousands of hidden reports of strange and bizarre animals, many never to see the light of day.

Others remain rooted firmly in the back of the mind of a hesitant witness, whilst others are simply forgotten.

In short, I can tell you about the 'alien hopping things', that we now know as wallabies. The errant population which supposedly escaped from an enclosure between East Grinstead and Tunbridge Wells. And there's the rampant kangaroos in the same area too. And all of these sightings occurred in the mid '70s.

And what about the angler who allegedly hooked an alligator type creature in Capstone Park, in Chatham just a few years ago. Or the Viperine Snakes and other snake-like creatures which have roamed the Kent border, including a 'massive' python which resides in disused gas pipes in some remote, local quarry.

And this tale was told to me by a local warden who mentioned that the elusive beast often fed on the hordes of rabbits. And so the beast of Burham was born.

Already we notice the brief descriptions of these yarns as they play out like urban legends and 'friend-of-a-friend' folk tales. And in their absurdity, we realise an adventure and a mystery.

The same can be said for the unknown vampiric sheep-slayer which terrorised flocks in Gravesend during December. Around the same time, in Gloucester, a large, black dog was blamed for similar attacks, but now we realise that such an animal would not attack some thirty sheep and simply puncture their flesh to consume their crimson fluids.

The story was covered by the London Daily Mail who gave brief mention to 'small armies of men' hunting the unseen predator.

Charles Fort also mentions the case in his 1932 classic book "Lo!", but at the time seemed sceptical in the sense that, and I quote: "If there is continuity, only fictitiously can anything be picked out of the nexus of all phenomena. "

However, during the present era, such tales of slaughtered sheep and silent predators are common, but the Gravesend incident actually occurred during 1905 indeed, there are reasons for caution, simply due to the fact that out of place animals, such as large felines, were not the trend.

However, evidence of such strangeness did come to light with regard to more mysterious attacks, but this time during the February and March months of 1905.

Sightings of nasty wolf-like animals circulated around the country, and in some areas, such as Cumwinton, in the north, a carcass of the marauder was produced. In the areas of Tonbridge and Sevenoaks unattended flocks of sheep would be savaged by some strange predator. Usually, three or four of the flock would be at least maimed, and

certainly in most cases slaughtered - way of disembowelment and heavy wounds to the shoulder This time though, the mystery killer was not unseen, in fact it was spotted many times and even shot at Like the big-cat flaps of today, this case was taken just as seriously and a team of fifty-plus men armed themselves and took to the local woods

Amazingly, the elusive animal was actually found, unlike many of todays mystery flesh-eaters A gamekeeper shot the beast, which, after examination, was pronounced as a jackal The story made the London papers although there were no explanations as to how the intruder got into the country However, the blood-thirsty animal eventually ended up stuffed and paraded in a taxidermists window in Derby However, finding it now may prove more difficult

The above case most certainly provides evidence to support the existence of large, out of place animals roaming our innocent and supposedly tamed wilds And the next two cases seem to suggest that Kent, although not the Canadian Rockys or Florida Everglades, is at times sufficient habitat for large animals

During a warm August, in the year 1983, brothers Mark(Aged 11) and Peter(aged 9) were playing in their garden when they noticed a hairy creature fall from a tree in their neighbour's garden

At the time, they lived at Slip Mill Lane at Hawk-hurst It was around 7 30am when they spotted the animal which they described as "bear-like"

Police were called to the scene and the boys believed the animal to be bigger than their 60lb dog, covered in brown, shaggy fur, having a long nose and black claws Rather strangely, the boys said they chased the animal which disappeared into undergrowth near Bedgebury Forest Large scratches were found on the tree from which the animal 'fell' but there was no other trace

What are we to make of such a report? Was it a monkey? A bear? Or an acrobatic anteater?

Big cats in Kent have become my obsession Unfortunately, I was not gifted enough to begin my research at the age of one but if I had been then I would have investigated the case of the Peckham Panther

It's 1975, January 5th and angler Fred Lloyd is perched on the banks of the River Medway, in the wilds of Kent In the stillness he waits for a bite when all of a sudden he is disturbed by a rustling in the bushes From here on the curious angler is confronted by a two-foot long, panther cub, hissing wildly with claws flashing However, the cat's vigour causes it to tumble down the bank towards dumbstruck Fred who instinctively grasps the little mite by the scruff of its neck and bundles it into his fishing box From here, he rushes home and places the agitated cub into a playpen which it soon destroys, and so a large, strong box will just have to do

Fred proceeds to phone all the local zoos who ensure him that no felines are missing and in some instances his claims are mocked By this time, the cub appears rather tired but not hungry, turning its nose up at raw meat and biting the teat off a bottle of milk

It takes Fred 24 hours and many phone-calls to convince the RSPCA to visit his house who in turn takes the cub to a home at Godstone, Surrey

The story does not end there A couple of weeks later an Essex zoo attempt to claim the cub as their escaped 'Zar', worth over £500 The zoo representative claims that the eight-week old cub was stolen on the 4th of January, and somehow appeared in Kent - some fifty miles away Unlikely, even if big cats are known for their large territory

It also must be mentioned that the journey from Colchester Zoo to Kent would take in a harsh coast, the Thames Estuary and well populated areas It would seem that the appearance of the Peckham Panther remains a mystery, but what Fred found could well have been just one of many cubs responsible for today s abundant population

There is always the possibility that someone let the leopard go, or that it did escape from a local private collection, but without doubt, this case remains one of the strongest in regards to evidence for the existence of any kind of exotic cat in the wild Although there was rumour of a dead big cat seen in a road at Dover, it would seem that the cute cub, all lost and lonely, has a lot of relatives still out there And they are a lot bigger

My final two cases bring to light examples of how Cryptozoology spans from a very realistic nature, to an almost exaggerated and vague lore

With so many mysterious felines roaming the country, we are always looking for theories with regards to where they came from During the October of 1984, five tigers were deliberately let loose from John Aspinall's Howletts Zoo park near Canterbury Two adult tigers, Putra and Gelam, and their wandering offspring, were sighted many times during a 45-minute spell The local postman was amazed to see such a sight and one, a three-year old female, was even spotted wandering aimlessly at fields near Littlebourne Unfortunate-ly, it had to be shot after it was seen prowling near goats The other four, however, were thankfully caught within the hour

Whilst Howletts Zoo always admits to any escapes, it is not the first time this sort of thing has happened Ten years previous, a clouded leopard was shot dead after eight months on the loose This resulted in a number of local livestock kills which ceased once the animal was destroyed

My final two snippets could well be the result of misidentification, exaggeration or startling fact We will never know A contact of mine who works for a Gravesend newspaper, spotted a mysterious creamy-coloured 'wild dog' at 7 30pm during March 2000 as she left work for home The woman witness was in her car, and about to leave her workplace when she noticed, in her headlights, a large cream animal nosing about a half-eaten strewn sandwich

She described the creature as being "Very long in its tail which hooked upwards and similar to some type of animal you would normally see on a prairie " She is certain the animal was not a fox and that it was covered in big patches of brown The animal had a long snout and it disappeared into the darkness when she drove toward it.

Could it have been a fox with some debilitating disease? A stray dog? Or indeed some kind of South American wild dog? Again, lack of detail gives the sighting many flaws, but makes it intriguing all the same

And finally, we go to Mill Hill at Minster during November of 1999. An experienced horse-rider named Sue Jackson (56) was returning home on her horse when she was attacked by a 'big bird'. The leisurely ride on her elderly horse along a quiet stretch of road became a nightmare ordeal as the bird of prey flew from nowhere, straight at her, causing her to be thrown from the horse.

The witness described the attack to a local paper, *"It was the most bizarre and frightening experience I was thrown and the horse bolted, but fortunately a workman on a nearby building site caught him before he ran into the busy Chequers Road "*

Unfortunately, her description of the bird was very vague due to the swiftness of the attack but she believes that the attacker had, " *an enormous wingspan"* but then strangely dismisses the giant marauder as nothing more than a falcon or kestrel

We must not jump to conclusions here, but due to lack of detail, such a case remains intriguing all the same Many brief tales of encounters with 'strange' animals are often nothing more than fleeting descriptions, and the tales I have covered are prime examples of that However, the materialisations of the creatures involved are often just as brief and mysterious, yet they remain embedded in literature and memory for ever

was shrouded and hazed by the mist, but it was no fox. It was like a phantom this 'thing', very black against the already dark grass of the shadowed fields and it moved swiftly without ever breaking into a run. I desperately tried to stay focused and I tracked this animal for a matter of ten or so seconds as it, in the distance, descended a slight slope and vanished into the darkness.

Everything felt very weird all of a sudden, just as it had done a month earlier. Again, the sighting was not as clear as I'd always hoped but it was almost teasing. There was no way we could have got a photograph of this majestic creature. There was no way our torch could have illuminated it any more than the stars above. As quickly as it appeared, the animal had vanished. We stood transfixed by it. We did not know what to do next. We decided to simply stand and wait. We thought that the cat may well have disappeared behind the lambs small-holding, and was waiting to pounce. It certainly did not continue the way it was heading but it may have turned right and headed toward Capstone Country Park, an area completely remote at night.

With this sighting I strongly felt that the creature was merely on its route. It never made any movements of curiosity, either toward us in the distance or the sheep only 100 yards away. It simply padded along, very gracile and silent. If though, it had continued its path, it would have reached Lordswood, where a dark cat had been seen the night before. If the saying "third time lucky" is indeed true, then I most certainly look forward to my next sighting of this animal. Myself and my father, both believe it was a black panther, and was most certainly the same animal we saw the previous month. It is indeed out there, stalking those lambs, preying on those sheep and stealing those chickens. It is also on a constant route. A route that mostly takes in inhospitable woodland, but occasionally brings this animal into the open fields. The frustrating fact with the existence of this animal in such unfamiliar country, is that it is pretty much nocturnal. Yes, there have been sightings in broad daylight, but a majority of reports come from the dead of night, mainly from anglers, poachers, gamekeepers and motorists working late shifts and driving to and from work. This particular cat MUST be tracked at night, a time when it is more powerful and most certainly has great advantage over a tracker like myself. It must also be tracked to a greater extent in the breath of Winter, when trees are bare and it must search more for prey such as rabbit. In the Summer months the foliage is extreme cover. And we must also remember that these animals are very intelligent and in their native hómeland extremely elusive. However, although this animal is simply flesh and blood, I do believe that some type of unnatural strangeness surrounds the whole enigma. With regards to sightings, it could be said that a chance would be a fine thing, but in my case it most certainly is and I do believe I will have more chances and somehow I think this damn cat knows that too!

Neil Arnold,
Kent

AND MORE...

Dear Jon,

I am writing to tell you of the experience my two sisters had of a big cat sighting here in the outskirts of our village in Glosby, Sutherland on separate occasions. The first time one of them saw the cat was early in the morning at 6 00 a m in August 1998 on her way to work between Dunrobin Castle and Brora. It was about the size of a labrador. She got within five feet of it and it looked straight at her. It had small, black-tipped ears and a very long tail and definitely looked puma like. It took off very fast down towards the beach.

My other sister was out walking with two friends one evening around May 1999. At the east end of Dunrobin Castle woods a medium sized dark brown cat leapt out of the grass in front of them, jumped over a three foot wall and ran down on to a large pipe on the beach. A local man has seen seven big cats in Loth north of Helemsdale in the early '80s. The animals my sisters saw moved very fast.

Moira Littlejohn
Glospie, Highlands, Scotland

ANIMALS & MEN

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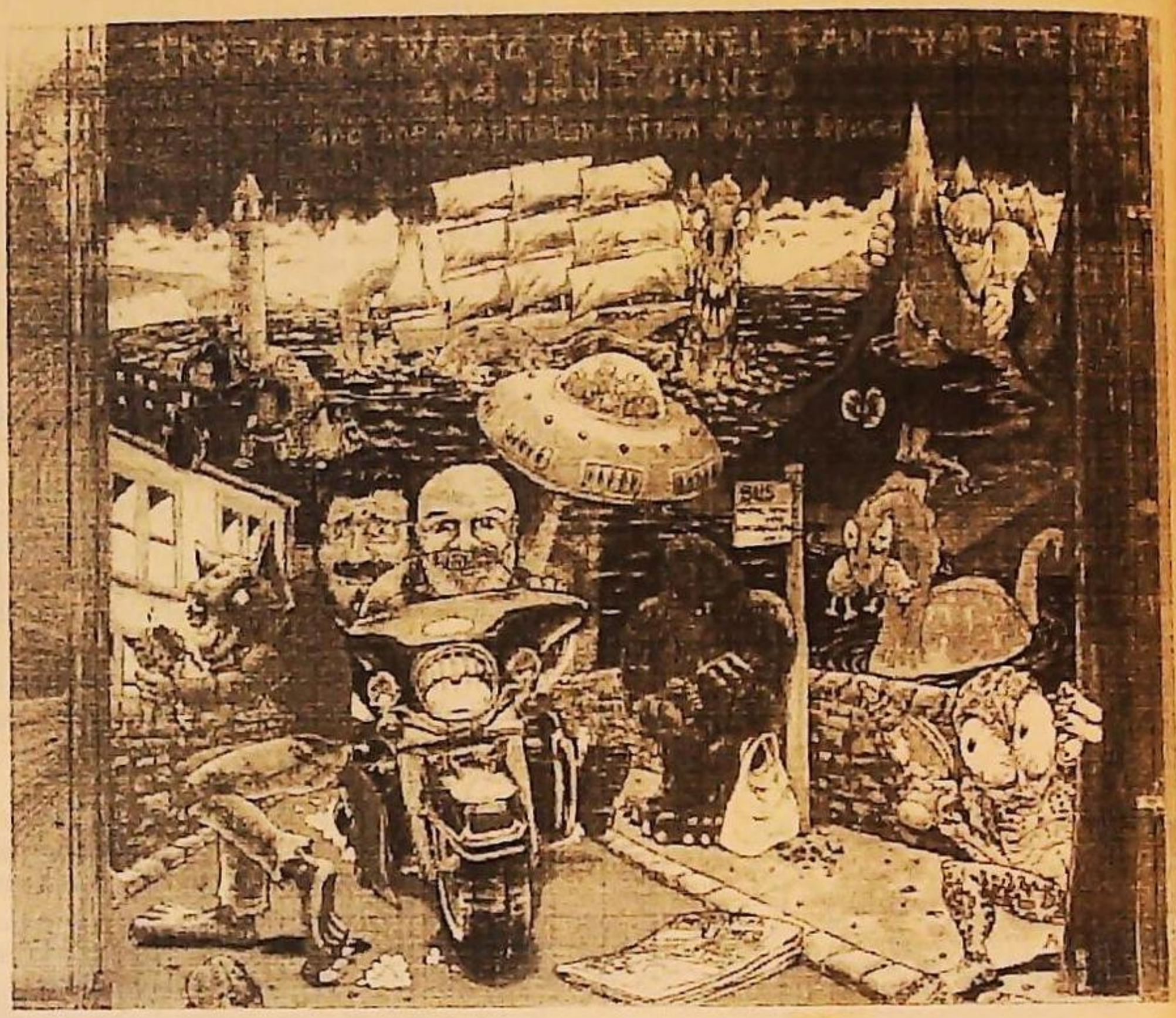

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